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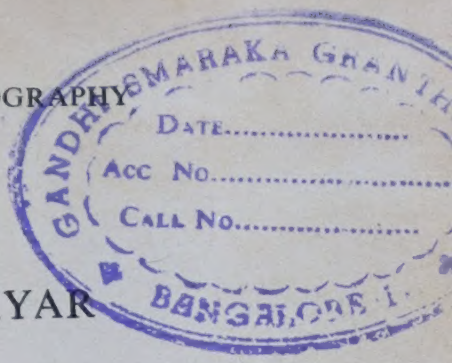

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PROLOGUE

It has been said that the all-round revival of the Tamil country in the first two decades of the century owes a lot to three brilliant sons of Tamil Nadu, Poet C. Subramania Bharati, Scholar-Revolutionary V. V. S. Aiyar and Swadeshi Steamship hero V. O. Chidambaram Pillai.

They were all dedicated patriots working with a passion each in his own chosen field for the liberation of Bharatmata.

All the three were imbued with a strong love of the Tamil language and the culture of the Tamil people. Each contributed his own quota to boost the self-esteem of the Tamils.

Free India celebrated the centenary of V. O. Chidambaram Pillai in 1972. The centenaries of V. V. S. Aiyar and Bharati come, respectively, in 1981 and 1982.

While the names of Bharati and Chidambaram Pillai are familiar to present-day India, it cannot be said that it is equally familiar with the name of V. V. S. Aiyar.

Aiyar was a lawyer who went to London to become a barrister, but became a dedicated revolutionary instead. He was the right-hand man of V. D. Savarkar in India House, London, 1907-10. He met Barrister M. K. Gandhi in London and tried to convert him to the revolutionary movement. Aiyar met the Mahatma a second time in Pondicherry in 1915 and it was the Mahatma who converted Aiyar. Since then, Aiyar was an ideal Gandhian.

Aiyar wrote many books in Tamil and English and his reputation as a scholar is immense. He is the Father of the modern short story in Tamil, and is a pioneer in literary criticism in Tamil Nadu. His translation of *Kural* and his *Kamba Ramayanam—A Study* are works appreciated by scholars all over the world. Aiyar's short-lived monthly *Bala Bharati* was also a pacesetter in Tamil. His national residential school, the Tamil Gurukulam, had great potentialities, but Aiyar did not live long enough to develop it to the full, which was a pity. His end was as heroic as his life.

Men of Aiyar's ilk are rare. They serve as beacon-lights on the path of selfless national service.

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V. V. S. AIYAR

I

VARAHANERI

TIRUCHI IS a fascinating city in the heart of present-day Tamil Nadu State in south India. Variously known as Tiruchi, Trichy, Trichinopoly, and Tiruchirappalli, this city, one of the most important in Tamil Nadu, is an ancient place, having been the capital of the oldest Chola rulers of the Tamil country. From Woriyur, now the western part of the city, Karikala Chola, (*c.* A.D. 190) the most celebrated of the early Cholas of the Sangam Age, ruled his empire. His exploits are referred to in many poems of that time. The long poem *Pattinappalai* portrays the plucky way in which he escaped from prison and reestablished himself on the Chola throne. He won a great battle at Venni, near Thanjavur, and another at Vahai-parandalai. His wars thus established for him a prime position among the crowned kings of the south. His various achievements are mentioned in several ancient poems, including the *Silappadikaaram*. Kaveri-patnam, the port, was a flourishing centre of sea-trade, and industry and commerce added to the affluence of Karikala. The king reclaimed forest land and increased the prosperity of the country by bunding the Kaveri river and building a great stone masonry dam at Kallanai, a dozen miles from Tiruchi. One of the earliest irrigation projects in human history, this dam survives to this day; it is only on its undisturbed original foundations that the

Grand Anicut was built by British engineers in the last century.

The scenery of Tiruchi is dominated by the unforgettable Rock Fort, a pile of granite rock which rises majestically to a height of two hundred and seventy-three feet (248 m). The Rock Fort is the centre of the city, and is a land mark for miles and miles around. A barren rock resembling in shape a chameleon lying head westwards, it has been embellished with a fortress-like temple more than half way up, the temple of Sri Matrubhuteswara. A covered flight of steps leads to the temple, and an open flight leads further up to the Pallava Caves and the Ucchi Pillayar Koil, a small Ganapati temple perched on the top of the rock.

From the Ucchi Pillayar Koil, one can have a magnificent panoramic view of the sprawling city and its picturesque surroundings. On the northern side, less than a mile away, the majestic Kaveri flows serenely by. The source of life and prosperity of the Chola country from time immemorial, the Kaveri is at its broadest at Tiruchi. Across the shimmering waters of the river, looking northward, the eye meets a pleasant green curtain of tall trees all along the bank on the other side. This green expanse is the island of Srirangam, the famous temple town and pilgrim centre.

Among the luscious mango trees, interspersed by waving coconut palms, the eye can discern the tall towers of the Srirangam and Tiruvanaikoil temples raising their heads in all their grandeur. Srirangam temple, the most ancient and largest of temples in India, houses the town of Srirangam itself within its seven walls. Seen from the top of the Rock, buses and lorries, motor cars and bullock-carts crossing the road bridge across the Kaveri look like moving toys, while trains crossing the rail bridge

nearby remind one of huge millepedes.

Beyond Srirangam, flows Kolladam (Coleroon), a man-made branch of the river Kaveri, which rejoins it eighteen miles downstream thus creating the island of Srirangam.

On the eastern side, the eye meets endless stretches of cultivated fields, rice paddies, plantain groves, and other food crops.

Turning south one meets with a very contrasting scenery; the long and winding bazaar street of Tiruchi Town wends its way for miles, ultimately reaching Tiruchi Junction, the main railway station in the city. On the way to the Junction, close-built houses and narrow streets mark the residential quarters, while further south many modern complexes like the Bharat Heavy Electricals, the Regional Engineering College and the Small Arms Factory meet the eye. The extensive Railway Workshop at Golden Rock near the Junction is an old establishment with an enviable reputation for production.

The view westward from the Rock shows us some historical spots. Immediately adjacent to the Rock, at its base, is the famous temple tank known as the Teppakulam. On the eastern bank of the tank is Clive's Hostel, a building associated with Robert Clive, the empire-builder, who lived there in Tiruchi as a young man. West of the tank is the Main Guard Gate of the old Tiruchi Fort, whose walls can still be seen there. The Western Boulevard, the main thoroughfare of Tiruchi, shows its association with the French, who held Tiruchi for a while. Near the Main Guard Gate rises the tall spire of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Lourdes, a miniature copy of the Basilica at Lourdes in southern France. The vast campus of St. Joseph's College, one of the premier educational institutions in the south, lies next to the Church.

Chola rule in Tiruchi was ended by Muslim invaders in the 14th century. Later, the Nayak rulers of Madurai held sway there, and for some decades Tiruchi was their capital. Tiruchi played a great part in the Maratha wars and the Anglo-French wars, and was the seat of Clive for a long time. In the Carnatic Wars, the city changed hands many times among the Nawabs and the British and the French. The palace of the Nawab of Arcot is now the Town Hall and Taluk Office, and the headless trunk of Chanda Sahib, one of the rival Nawabs, is buried in the Nathershah Mosque in the town.

There are many other historic spots in Tiruchi district, such as Gangaikonda Cholapuram, which was the Chola capital for three centuries from the 11th, and Karur, where archaeologists have unearthed a large number of Roman coins, indicating commercial contact with Rome in the early centuries of the Christian era.

Located between highly industrialised Coimbatore district and predominantly agricultural Thanjavur district, Tiruchi enjoys the reputation for both industry and agriculture. Similarly, having been in the hands of Cholas, Pallavas, Nayaks, Muslims, the English, the French and the Marathas, Tiruchi has a cosmopolitan outlook. It is modern and forward-looking, without losing its ancient moorings.

Such is the birth-place of *Varahaneri* Venkatesa Subramania Aiyar, the hero of this biography.

Varahaneri, which was a hamlet in the last century and is now part and parcel of Tiruchi Town, is situated near the biggest vegetable market of the town, the Gandhi Market. Varahaneri had a thriving community of businessmen, with a small Brahmin population in Agraharam Street. The ancestral house of V.V.S.Aiyar in this street still remains in the hands of a branch of the family.

Varahaneri Venkatesa Aiyar, father of V.V.S. Aiyar, belonged to a middle-class family of Tiruchi. With English education becoming popular in the last century, Venkatesa Aiyar himself picked up some English without much schooling. Later, he and his brother passed the F.A. (First year in Arts) Examination, ranking first in the whole of the presidency. So both were selected for Government service and a job was offered to each of them in the Postal Department. Venkatesa Aiyar was made a postmaster in distant Ramanathapuram, on a salary of five rupees per month. After a while he resigned his job and settled in Vadavoor, a hamlet now in another part of Tiruchi Town, and started a banking business of his own. His banking business thrived and he shifted to Varahaneri.

Venkatesa Aiyar was a man about town, quite influential in business circles. His own outfit, Varahaneri Subramania Janopakara Nidhi, was a flourishing concern. In 1888, he helped found the Trichinopoly Varthaga Sangam, Ltd., a co-operative sales and credit society, still going strong. From 1893 to 1913, Venkatesa Aiyar was a Director of the Sangam, specialising in audit of accounts.

During his later years, Venkatesa Aiyar was much concerned about the virulent propaganda of the Christian missionaries and their efforts directed towards conversion of a large number of Hindus. He went from door to door canvassing in an attempt to re-convert them to the Hindu fold. He even approached the Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakotipeetam for permission to reconvert them, but the Acharya could not give any sanction. Disappointed, Venkatesa Aiyar continued his efforts by word of mouth and by printed leaflets.

Venkatesa Aiyar married Kamakshi Ammal, hailing

from the village of Chinnalappampatti near Karur. On the 2nd of April, 1881, his wife gave birth to their first son, who was christened Subramaniam. The date according to the Tamil calendar was the 22nd of Panguni in the year Vikrama, and the birth star was Krittika, the star of Lord Subramania. At home the boy was called Mani, the common abbreviation of the name Subramaniam.

Ardently believing that the Hindu way of life must be taught to children even when they are young, Venkatesa Aiyar often gathered together a good number of boys and girls of the neighbourhood and took them walking to visit Srirangam and Tiruvanaikoil temples on festival days. He told them stories from the Hindu epics and puranas to make them forget the tiresome four-mile walk. He would keep fried peas in plenty and distribute them to them to ward off hunger. Like the other children, Subramaniam also joined the trips when he was old enough to walk the distance. His father's tales of the exploits of the ancient Hindu heroes spurred the heroic instinct in the young lad. He had a good memory and he repeated the tales to his own schoolmates. He also arranged to enact scenes from the epics, and took the roles of Rama and Arjuna with home-made bows and arrows.

Subramaniam took physical exercise seriously and he did *bhaski* and *dandal*, and swung the *karla kattai*, the Indian club. He liked manly games, and was an expert in swimming. The small canal at the end of his street provided him ample opportunity for splashing in the water all day long. He was bold, and soon became an esteemed leader in his circle.

While yet a lad, an occasion arose to test his courage. Beyond the stream mentioned, there was and still is a Kali temple in a lonely spot surrounded by bushes.

Snakes and jackals were aplenty there after sunset. Subramaniam was challenged to visit this temple at midnight, the hour when ghosts and ghouls are up and about, on a pitch-dark night. As a mark of accomplishment, he was to bring the kumkum from the temple doors and the oily soot from the *bali peetam* before it. Subramaniam accepted the challenge, waded through the stream, walked to the temple without faltering steps, and brought back the proofs.

Subramaniam passed the matriculation examination in 1895, ranking fifth in the Presidency. Joining St. Joseph's College, he passed his B.A. examination with credit in 1899. His subjects were History, Economics and Latin. He stood first in Latin. He was the recipient of the College scholarship in his studies and was the envy of all his classmates as he carried away a number of prizes. He was the favourite of his professors, and in the discussions of the College Freethinkers' Society, he showed annoying patience during discussions and smiled away all opposition.

In literature, Subramaniam's tastes were wide; he was at home with Virgil, Homer and Shakespeare, Kamban and Kalidasa, Spencer and Huxley, Schopenhauer and Emerson, all of whom drew him towards them. His love for Emerson was particularly strong. He considered his essay "Self-Help" an all-time great, and in later years translated it into Tamil.

Chess and astronomy too interested Subramaniam. He spent many nights seeing the stars with the aid of the telescope that the College had.

In 1897, Subramaniam was married to Bhagyalakshmi, four years younger than him. Bhagyalakshmi Ammal was to prove an able partner to Aiyar in his troublous times as a revolutionary. She also participated in the

Non-cooperation and other Gandhian movements. She survived Aiyar and lived to a ripe old age of 73.

Subramaniam passed the Pleader's Examination in Madras in the First Grade in 1902. He then enrolled himself as a First Grade Pleader in the District Court at Tiruchi. The life of a pleader provided Subramaniam with all that he could want; money, reputation and leisure. In his leisure hours, he spent his time with his books and in playing chess. He sent solutions of chess problems to London and Holland. Like his father, he too became a Director of the Varthaga Sangam.

During the Swadeshi Movement days, Subramaniam planned with V.O. Chidambaram Pillai aud Subramania Sivam; two prominent leaders, to start a Swadeshi Cotton Factory. But the venture did not come off

Five years of placid life as pleader made Subramaniam hanker after a change. Was he to go to Madras, qualify himself better, and set up practice as a High Court Vakil following the pattern of many successful lawyers of the day? He did not know and was awaiting an answer, when Destiny beckoned him in a diffierent direction. A cousin of his wife, one K.G. Pasupati Aiyar, who was having a flourishing textile trade with shops in Rangoon, Bangalore and Pondicherry, suggested that Subramaniam set up legal practice in Rangoon. The Indian business community in Rangoon badly needed reliable Indian lawyers, and Pasupati further arranged for Subramaniam to be apprenticed to an English barrister.

But many obstacles stood in the way. Crossing the oceans was not approved by the orthodox, and Subramaniam's mother wondered if he would be able to keep up the daily ablutions prescribed for a Brahmin youth. Probably she had a presentiment that he was slipping away from her life for all time. This proved true, for

Subramaniam never saw his mother again after he left for Rangoon.

However, his father was all for his going to Rangoon. He blessed his son with the Biblical phrase, "Go like Saul and come like Paul". Subramaniam sailed for Rangoon in 1906.

Subramaniam was well liked by his Senior, the English barrister. Since many of the barrister's clients were Tamil Chettiars, whose knowledge of English was limited, a junior like Subramaniam came in very handy. And, Subramaniam showed himself an expert in case summary. One day, talking to the Englishman, Pasupati Aiyar asked him how his brother-in-law was shaping. The Englishman was not only all praise, but also added that the young man would do well to go to London and qualify as a barrister. Pasupati Aiyar was immensely pleased. But when he heard of it, Subramaniam was unhappy, since he had no wherewithals for such a venture.

Now, in Rangoon at that time there were other families from Tiruchi intimately known to Subramaniam. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, another migrant from Tiruchi, who was an able doctor, was insulted by an arrogant English I.M.S. man, and Rajan quit Government service in protest. He garnered enough money to go to London and soon left Rangoon for India, *en route* to London. Rajan's departure whetted Subramaniam's own appetite to go.

Fortunately Pasupati Aiyar came up with a scheme of his own. He was a person who dabbled in the share market, and he thought it would help him considerably to have someone in London to do his buying and selling. If Subramanian could attend to this besides his studies, he was prepared to help him to go. But Subramaniam knew nothing of stocks and shares. It was a measure of his eagerness to go that he sat at Pasupati Aiyar's feet

and learnt the ABC of stocks and shares to the satisfaction of Pasupati Aiyar.

Thus it was that within ten months of his arrival in Rangoon, Subramaniam was again on the high seas, this time for London. As he left for England in the last quarter of 1907, Subramaniam shortened his name; now on he was to be known only as V.V.S. Aiyar.

The young Aiyar who left Rangoon for England wore impeccable European dress, had a cropped head parted in the middle. A manly moustache adorned his face. But for all this love of European manners, he was still the old lover of his own culture; his box was still full of books of classic works in Tamil and Sanskrit, besides English and Latin. He had not forgotten to include a complete set of the *Ramayana* in Tamil by Kamban, "Emperor among Poets". Aiyar was a Kamban scholar and has done much to propagate his classic.

When the ship touched Aden, two other Indian travellers joined him. One was a devout Sikh gentleman and the other an Arya Samajist Hindu. Aiyar spent hours with them discussing their particular brand of religion. He learnt by heart Sikh prayers like Japji and Sukhamani, reciting them sonorously along with his Sikh friend. The elimination of the caste system in Sikhism and the virulent patriotism of the Sikh gurus, particularly Guru Gobind Singh, attracted him considerably to his last days. Aiyar was a lover of Sikhism : he was proposing to reform Tamil society by something similar, during the last weeks of his life. Unfortunately, he was snatched away before the plans took shape.

With the Arya Samajist, Aiyar chanted Vedic prayers, which he loved dearly.

As it happened, some Muslim travellers joined the ship at Cairo, Aiyar had an opportunity to learn about Islam

as practised abroad. He was impressed by the Muslims' strict observance of daily prayers and their intense faith in their religion.

All these experiences came in handy to him much later in life particularly when he was escaping from London in different disguises, once as a Sikh gentleman and at another time as a Muslim pilgrim and businessman.

The few weeks of sea travel were over soon and Aiyar arrived in London on the 10th of October, 1907.

Aiyar's first months in London were devoted to acclimatising himself to the atmosphere of a foreign country and to adjusting his daily life to the manners, modes and circumstances of an alien race. He enrolled himself in Lincoln's Inn, one of the four Inns of Court imparting legal training. Study for barristership was not one that required regular attendance at a school or college. Participation in twenty-four dinners in a year at his Inn made the candidate eligible to appear for the examination. All study was to be the candidate's own effort. This provided a lot of free time, and Aiyar familiarised himself with the London Share Market.

Aiyar had taken a room in a lodging house at the outset, although vegetarian food posed a problem. Keenly interested in music, he enrolled himself for lessons in Western music and ballroom dancing. Ballroom dancing, he surmised, was an essential asset to anyone wishing to come up in English society. He read a number of books on music and picked up some dance steps. All these, however, were to last only three months, as something happened to put an abrupt end to them.

Aiyar's search for a vegetarian mess took him to India House ultimately. Before discovering this address, he had questioned many of the seven hundred and fifty Indian students in Britain at the time, of whom a hundred

were in London. Most of them, he discovered, had succumbed to non-vegetarian food, tired of the quest. However, even those who had thus fallen, craved for vegetarian dishes once in a while. In the course of his enquiries, Aiyar came across the name "India House" in Highgate in northern London, an Indian lodging house where vegetarian Indian food was easily available. Aiyar decided to try the new place.

Little did Aiyar know that the Fates were taking him to a rendezvous where a warm welcome, a friendly handshake and a casual conversation were to produce phenomenal changes in his whole life.

II

INDIA HOUSE, LONDON

INDIA HOUSE, to which V.V.S. Aiyar was directed, was a mess-cum-lodge established in 1905 at 65, Cromwell Road, Highgate, London N. by a Gujarati scholar-revolutionary-philanthrophist, Shamji Krishna Varma, a barrister settled in London.

Born in 1857 in Mandvi in Kutch, Gujarat, Shamji had studied in Bombay, and even as a student become a disciple of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of of Arya Samaj. Well-versed in Sanskrit, Shamji's merit was recognised by such Western Sanskrit authorities as Max Mueller and Prof. Monier Williams. Shamji went to England and in 1879 passed the B.A. examination of the Cambridge University. Then he studied law and was called to the bar as a barrister. He read a paper, "The Origin of Writing in India", at the Royal Asiatic Society and was elected Member. The Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet sent him in 1881 to Berlin to represent India at the Congress of Orientalists.

Returning to India, Shamji served three Indian Princely States—Ratlam, Udaipur, and Junagadh—as either Dewan or Member-in-Council. But soon he was drawn towards the political views of Lokamanya Tilak, and this got him into trouble. After the arrest of Tilak in 1897, Shamji left India to settle permanently in London.

In London, he studied Sociology under the English

philosopher, Herbert Spencer. So deeply was he attached to his master, that when Spencer died in 1903, he announced at the funeral that he would donate a thousand pounds for establishing a Lecturership in Oxford University in his master's name. Shamji also erected a statue for Herbert Spencer in London when Spencer's own countrymen had not started to appreciate his greatness. Shamji took to heart Spencer's dictum that "resistance to aggression is not simply justifiable but imperative."

Shamji Krishna Varma wanted India to become a free republic like France, for which he had great regard. He translated into Sanskrit the French anthem "Marseillaise" and started the Indian Home Rule Society in London, with a monthly organ called "The Indian Sociologist".

Another important benefaction of Shamji was the Shivaji Scholarship for Indian students desiring to study in Europe. Preliminary selection was done in India by such eminent public men as Tilak and Editor Shivram Pant Paranjpe or the "Kal" daily.

It was as a Shivaji scholar that Vinayak Damodar Savarkar had come to England. Specially recommending him, Tilak had written to Shamji: "When there is such a rush like that, it is no use recommending anyone particularly to your notice. But, still, I may state, among the applicants there is one Mr. Savarkar from Bombay, who graduated last year and whom I know to be a spirited young man very enthusiastic in the Swadeshi cause, so much so that he had to incur the displeasure of the Fergusson College authorities. He has no mind to take up Government service at any time and his moral character is good." Shamji was also impressed. Signing an agreement before Tilak, Savarkar received through him Rs 400 as the first instalment of the Shivaji scholarship and set sail for London.

Savarkar was from the illustrious Chitpavan brahmin clan that had produced Nana Fadnavis in 1857 and Bal Gangadhar Tilak later on. Born in Nasik in May 1883, son of a jagirdar, Savarkar showed promise even as a boy; at the age of ten, his poems were being published in Poona papers. Events were moving to a climax in Maharashtra at that time. Famine and plague took a heavy toll of lives. Plague operations under a bullying Plague Commissioner, W.C. Rand, were irritating the people. Tilak warned the authorities, but was not heeded. In the midst of this travail the authorities decided to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of Accession, in utter disregard of the miserable plight of the people. Two young men, the Chapekar brothers of Poona, shot Rand dead and another Englishman, Ayerst, on the day fixed for the Diamond Jubilee. Suspecting Tilak of involvement, the Government arrested him. He was charged with sedition and sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment; leave to appeal was refused. As for the Chapekar brothers, they were sentenced to death and hanged.

The martyrdom of the Chapekar brothers stirred young Savarkar profoundly. At the dead of night, he took a vow before the family deity that he would work for driving the Britishers out of India and devote his entire life to it; he would sacrifice the comforts of his nearest and dearest in the cause. It was a vow similar to the one taken by Shivaji before Goddess Bhavani.

Soon Savarkar started gathering a band of devoted young men, who called themselves "Mitra Mela", "Friend's Union". They believed in an armed revolt, if necessary, to free the country. In 1902, Savarkar joined the Fergusson College in Poona for higher studies. A secret meeting of Mitra Mela was held with two hundred

members from all over Maharashtra attending, and the name of the body was changed to Abhinav Bharat. Its activities were extended to other parts of the country also. Many noted figures in our struggle for freedom had been members of Abhinav Bharat some time or other. Acharya Kripalani joined the society when he was a student of the Deccan College, Poona; B.G. Kher, the first Congress Chief Minister of Bombay, was another member. A Poona weekly, "Vihari", became the mouthpiece of Abhinav Bharat.

It was at this time that Savarkar received the Shivaji scholarship; he was glad he could go to London, where he was hopeful of contacting revolutionaries of the West.

Savarkar reached London in July 1906 and took his lodgings in India House. He got himself admitted to Gray's Inn for his legal studies. Shamji Krishna Varma was so impressed by Savarkar's dedication that he also joined Abhinav Bharat. In 1907, Shamji handed over management of India House to Savarkar and left for Paris to reside there. In Paris, Madame Bhikaji Cama, a fiery young Parsi lady, was spearheading revolutionary opposition to the British.

Savarkar started the Free India Society in India House, and this was a front organisation for recruiting members for Abhinav Bharat. India House had space for twenty lodgers, but there were never more than seven permanent lodgers at any time. The House was always full when it held its weekly dinners, followed by lectures on Indian topics.

It was into this beehive of nationalist activity that Aiyar stepped some time in 1907. Savarkar has described their first meeting thus:

"In 1907 or somewhere thereabouts, one day the maid-servant at the famous India House in London handed a

visiting card to us as we came downstairs to dine and told us the gentleman was waiting in the drawing-room. Presently the door was flung open and a gentleman, neatly dressed in European costume and inclined to be fashionable, warmly shook hands with us. He told us he had been a pleader in Rangoon and had come over to England to qualify himself as a full-fledged barrister. He was past thirty and seemed a bit agreeably surprised to find us so young. He assured us of his intention to study English music and even assured us that he was eager to get a few lessons in dancing as well. We, as usual, entered our mild protest against thus dissipating the energy of our youth in light-hearted pastimes when momentous issues hung in the balance. The gentleman, unconvinced, though impressed, took our leave promising to continue to call upon us every now and then. He was Shrijut V.V.S. Aiyar."

Savarkar had over-estimated Aiyar's age: Aiyar was only twenty-six, but looked older because of his sturdy build. To Aiyar, Savarkar, who was only two years younger than him but was lean and bony, looked much younger than his age.

This initial visit left a lasting impress on Aiyar, as well as on Savarkar. They were to become lifelong friends, both dedicated to the cause of Indian freedom. The first result of this meeting was that Aiyar soon moved into India House as a permanent lodger. A little later, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, who had preceded Aiyar to London, also joined India House. The trio were the mainspring of India House activities, with Aiyar becoming Vice-President of Abhinav Bharat and Savarkar's righthand man.

Aiyar's fashionable creased suits gave way to everyday utilitarian wear. Lessons in Western music and ballroom

dancing were given the go-by. Costly dinners and expensive entertainment of friends were forgotten. Even the interest in studying for law took a second place in the new scheme of things.

The activities of India House are decribed by Dr. T.S.S Rajan thus: "In the meetings of our Association held fortnightly, at least thirty persons attended. Half of them came mainly for the Indian food that we served... During food and at all leisure hours, we used to discuss the philosophy of Indian Independence, the methods that should be adopted for gaining it, and developments in India as gleaned from Indian papers received by us. As our activities increased, we were followed by British Intelligence men. Because of this, the number of permanent residents was always limited."

Indian students in London then were mostly sons of rich families, and they not only had no thought for the Motherland, but did their best to ape the Britisher. To them the end and aim of life was a well-paid job or a flourishing practice, and a life of luxurious ease. It was this callous attitude that the young men of India House set themselves to change They were not monied, but the fervour of their faith compensated for everything. To them, Indian heroes of the past were no tame historical figures, but living messengers of the glory of Bharat. They celebrated the birthdays of these heroes and also important festivals like Diwali and Dussehra. All these occasions of a get-together were used for lectures and discussions. On these days they tried to invite visiting Indian leaders who might be in London, but it was only rarely that they were successful in getting them to attend. Most Indian visitors were Moderate leaders who almost invariably restricted themselves to addressing officially sponsored meetings in the East India Association or the

Imperial Institute, and revelled in making disparaging observations about so-called "Extremists" of the Tilak school and the Revolutionaries. The India House young men attended such meetings too to heckle ; they could not allow any calumny to go unchallenged.

They also made friends with journalists connected with British papers, particularly Irishmen and the younger set. With their aid they were able to get some of their own news items published occasionally. Once in a while they put out printed pamphlets advocating the cause of Indian freedom and circulated them gratis to Members of Parliament and other opinion-making groups. They also printed passionate appeals to the Indian people to come out of their lethargic shell and work for the common weal and for Indian freedom. Since publications were generally proscribed by the British authorities in India, they were quietly smuggled into the country through travellers and then widely distributed.

Abhinav Bharat, of which V.V.S. Aiyar had become Vice-President, made it clear that "the liberation of the Motherland was to be achieved by a preparation for war which included (1) the teaching of Swadeshi, boycott and national training; (2) purchase and storing of weapons in neighbouring countries; (3) opening of small factories; (4) purchasing of weapons in foreign countries and smuggling them into India; (5) adopting guerrilla tactics whenever possible ; and (6) waiting for a favourable opportunity to rise in revolt." Such an opportunity, they felt, was drawing near as Europe was fast rushing towards a big war. The young men expected to take advantage of the world situation and fight the Britisher to throw them out of India.

With this ambitious objective, the young men got into touch with Irish, Turkish, and Russian revolutionaries,

learning from them the technique of revolutionary organising, as well as the handling of arms and ammunition. They tried secretly to make bombs in the back-rooms of India House; Savarkar often appeared at the meetings of Abhinav Bharat with the yellow stain of picric acid on his hands. Pistols were purchased in Britain and abroad. There was not much difficulty in purchasing firearms. The firearms as well as the bomb manual were smuggled into India, packed inside bulky books and in the false bottoms of boxes. Abhinav Bharat sent two of its lively members, Senapati Bapat and Hemchandra Das, to Paris to learn the art of manufacturing bombs from a Russian nihilist revolutionary there. They learnt it first hand and brought a Bomb Manual from him. This was cyclostyled and Bapat and two other members of Abhinav Bhart left for India with copies for all-India distribution. Bapat, Hotilal Varma and Hemchandra Das reached India and distributed copies of the Bomb Manual to important revolutionary centres in the country. Then followed the memorable event of the year, India's first bomb thrown at District Magistrate Kingsford by Khudiram Bose, a nineteen-year-old lad of Muzzaffarpur, Bengal, on April 30, 1908

When Abhinav Bharat learnt that the International Socialist Congress was to meet in Stuttgart in Germany in August 1907, it chose Madame Bhikaji Cama, who was formerly Secretary to Dadhabhai Naorojee when he was a Member of the British Parliament, and Sardar Singhji Rana, two of its members, to represent India at the Conference. Despite opposition from the British Socialist Representative Ramsay MacDonald, Madame

Cama, supported by Maurice Hyndman of England and Jean Jaures of France, moved a resolution on Indian freedom and unfurled a "Flag of Free India" at the Conference. A replica of this flag was with Aiyar for a long time ; Aiyar's son Krishnamoorthy vividly remembers having seen it in their house in Pondicherry as late as 1916-20. The flag, it seems, consisted of three horizontal strips of colour of equal width, similar in colour to the red, white and blue of the French flag. The top section had eight stars in a row, the middle section had the words "Vande Mataram" in Sanskrit, and the bottom section had the Sun on the left and the Moon on the right. The stars represented the eight provinces of India, the Sun represented the Hindus and the Moon the Muslims.

Unfurling the flag at the Conference, Madame Cama said, "The Flag is of Indian Independence. Behold, it is born. It is already sanctified by the blood of martyred Indian youth. I call upon you, gentlemen, to rise and salute the Flag of Indian Independence. In the name of the Flag I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to co-operate with this Flag in freeing one-fifth of the human race!"

The delegates stood up and saluted the Flag.

One of the schemes of the Abhinav Bharat revolutionaries was to organise an anti-British United Front with a view to rising simultaneously in revolt against the British Empire. Prominent leaders from Egypt then residing in London and Paris promised support for blocking the vital Suez Canal in the event of armed rising in India. Savarkar was in touch with Sinn Fein leaders in Ireland and was contributing vigorous political articles to the "Gaelic American" an anti-British Irish Nationalist paper from New York. These articles were also translated into

other languages for distribution in European countries. Kemal Ata Turk, the leader of Turkish revolution, who was in London organising resistance to the Turkish monarchy, was contacted by V.V.S. Aiyar and others.

The India House young men were also drawing inspiration from the lives of patriots of other lands. Savarkar translated into Marathi the autobiography of Mazzini, the Italian patriot who helped to free Italy from the Austrian yoke. Similarly, the life of Garibaldi, who organised the Italian people and created a united Italy, was written in Indian languages and sent to India for publication in nationalist papers there. Napoleon's life and his battle strategies were studied by India House for emulation when occasion arose.

V.V.S. Aiyar wrote in Tamil the life of Garibaldi and sent it for serial publication in the Tamil weekly "India" edited by poet Subramania Bharati and published from Pondicherry. The matter was serialised for a whole year. Aiyar also sent a weekly "London Letter" to the paper focusing attention on events of interest to India happening in London and Europe and rousing the Indian people to a sense of their right to liberty. The "London Letter" provided instances of British brutality and ruthless suppressions of Irish efforts to free themselves from the British yoke. It also revealed how in world affairs British influence was not as supreme as it was painted to them in India.

Dr. Rajan wrote about Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi and her life was also serialised in "India". Savarkar worked assiduously poring into valuable original records of the so-called "Indian Mutiny" of 1857 and proved with substantial evidence that the rising was not a mutiny but only modern India's First War of Independence. The book by Savarkar in Marathi on 1857 was translated

into English by a team of young Indians in London, consisting of some Marathi-speaking students and V.V.S. Aiyar. 1857 was an inspiration to all of them in India House.

Aiyar was a man of a studious nature. Within a short while of his going to London, he familiarised himself with the London share market and started operating on behalf of his brother-in-law, Pasupati Aiyar. He also used his free time to go to the British Museum to gather material on the life of Napolen. Day after day he spent his time digging into official records, historical documents, and books in English and French. The result of this vast research he put into a Tamil book titled "Napoleon", which was published years later in Pondicherry. Since military strategy was not a subject with which Indian patriots were familiar, Aiyar had taken great pains to explain Napoleon's military strategy so that it could be useful to Indian patriots when need arose. This masterpiece of Aiyar's was confiscated and destroyed by the British authorities in the Madras Presidency. As ill-luck would have it, even the copies with the Aiyar family and his friends have not survived the many vicissitudes that they underwent before Independence. The book unhappily is lost for all time.

Luckily, however, other books by Aiyar and a priceless Memoranda Notebook of Aiyar's years in London have come to our hands, fairly unscathed and full. Notebook is a small bound volume, purchased by Aiyar in the first week of his arrival in the British capital. It contains many a treasured piece of information of great value for understanding Aiyar and his friends at India House. It is amazing that this intimate diary-like personal notebook had escaped the lynx-eyed Scotland Yard and other Intelligence men combing for evidence against Aiyar.

This precious London Notebook is now preserved in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, along with other papers and correspondence of Aiyar, presented to the nation by Aiyar's son Dr. V.V.S. Krishnamoorthy.

An interesting feature of the notebook is that it is written in English long hand as well as in Pitman's shorthand (English). Many pages are written in Tamil, some in Sanskrit and some in Grandha characters. Even in using the Pitman system, Aiyar had cleverly created and used a good number of grammalogues (abbreviations) of his own, possibly to baffle interlopers.

The date of the purchase of the London Notebook is written in Aiyar's neat, cursive longhand, "V.V.S. Aiyar, 15th October 1907". One of the first entries gives the information, "Arrived in London 10th October 1907". Another early entry reads, "Swaraj should soon be acquired".

An important and interesting entry, noted on the inside page of the front flap reads :

"1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
S U B R A M O N I E"

Subramonie is Aiyar's personal name Subramaniam written French style. Obviously the synchronisation of the letters of his name and the numbers is a code for conveying confidential messages. As Aiyar was known only as V.V.S. Aiyar generally, even his full personal name Subramaniam was not known to all. Its French modification was still less known. By allocating *ten numbers to* the ten letters of the alphabet in his name, and likewise repeating the process with plus and minus or other signs for the remaining letters of the alphabet, a simple, but baffling code could be worked out. Even an explicitly worded message like "SENDING ONE DOZEN BROWNING AUTOMATIC PISTOLS PASS TO

SWAMI ACKNOWLEDGE AIYAR" could be made to read in code like: "$108 \times 198 \times 2\$780\$ \times 17 \times 808\$347 —2898 × 2$52—3765—39—8"/etc., etc.

The curious reader can read the message with the following key: A 5; B 3; C —8; D ×1; E 0; F —7; G ×2; H —6; I 9; J ×3; K —5; L ×4; M 6; N 8; O 7; P —4; Q ×5; R 4; S 1; T —3; U 2; V ×6; W —2; X ×7; Y —1; Z ×8. Symbol for space: $

The following cryptic entry clearly shows Aiyar's interest in explosive chemicals and their place of procurement in India:

"Pragjee Soorjee & Co, Kazi Syed St., Bombay—Aniline, Alizarine Dyes, Sulphur, Direct and Acid Colours. The Victoria Commercial Agency, Dacca, Bengal. 22 grosses supplied for V.P.P. for Rs. 20. 22 dozen supplied for Rs. 2 if 2 as. stamp is sent first."

Another entry in a nearby page says: "Recollections of a Spy: 25 Years in the Secret Service", published by Heinemann, London, price 2sh. 6d.

Its purport is obvious.

Under the title "Hindu National Yell" the following yell has been suggested:

Hindu, Hindu, Hindustan (3 times)
Hindustan (slow) aaleshaan
Pathe hai nishaan,
Shaan, shaan, shaan
Teri Hindustan.

Yell is organised cheer-like shouting done on such occasions as athletic sports to encourage particular teams. College Yells are popular in the West. Aiyar must have thought it would be good to have a Hindu (Indian) National Yell for the people of Hindustan, to give them

a sense of solidarity and cheer.

Aiyar breaks into poetry in English, on another page of the Notebook. The poem, "Vande Mataram" has seven stanzas, of which the first, third and sixth are given here:

1. Hail land of ancient fame
Bharat of holy name,
Motherland mine!
Teach me to know thy worth
O land of Sacred Birth.
Thou Soul of all the Earth,
My heart is thine!

3. Wherever my feet may roam,
Thou art my well-loved home,
My country dear!
The magic of thy air,
And all thy beauties rare
But haunt us everywhere
Both far and near.

6. All men their Gods may bring
All men their creeds may sing
On thy broad breast.
Thy gracious arms embrace
All who accept they grace,
Thou Mother of the Race,
Forever blest.

Lest the extracts from Aiyar's London Notebook give the impression that he was a morose and serious man all the time, it must be mentioned that he was quite a cheerful person, as ready to laugh at a joke as the next person. The notebook contains notings of the names of some books of fun also. Besides, Aiyar has written down some funny tales. Probably he had a mind to

translate humorous tales popular in Tamil Nadu, and a list of such tales is given as well as the following item translated from the Tamil in English verse :

The Miser's Dream

"Why did you get up my tree, sirrah?"
"To look for my strayed calf, sir."
"How can you find your strayed calf there?"
"That is why I am getting down, sir."

This is a variation of an age-old story of Tamil Nadu of the thief who was caught up a coconut tree. When asked why he went up the tree, he answered, "In search of grass." On being asked, "Fool, does grass grow on a coconut tree?" the thief blandly replied : "That is why I am coming down, sir."

III

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF 1857

In 1907, a section of the English public decided to "celebrate" on the 1st of May that year the Fiftieth Anniversary of their "victory over the mutineers of 1857" in India. Leading organs of the British Press and the European-owned papers in India vied with one another in bringing out special numbers and printing special articles scurrilously reviling the Indian heroes of 1857 as self-centred murderous brigands. Naturally, the India House group could not allow this to go unchallenged.

The British celebrants staged a play in London in which Rani Lakshmibai and Nana Saheb were shown as ruffians and uncouth villains. To set the picture right, India House decided to celebrate its own Golden Jubilee of the heroes of 1857. On May 10, 1907, a great and memorable meeting was held in India House, fasts were observed and vows taken to undergo a week of self-denial. A pamphlet, "O Martyrs!" was printed and circulated widely. Indian students of Oxford and Cambridge, as well of the Inns of Court, appeared wearing badges with the slogan "Honour to the Martyrs of 1857". Indian leaders in London nervously disassociated themselves from these activities. In trains and streets scuffles took place between aggressive Britishers and Indian youth wearing the badges. Refusing to remove the badge, Harnam Singh and R. M. Khan, two Indian students,

were expelled from college. Some students lost their scholarships and had to return home.

In the Press, a virulent campaign began against Shamji Krishna Varma, V. D. Savarkar and their associates. "The Times" and "John Bull" sent their men to interview Savarkar. The pressmen were visibly surprised that he was a youth of polished manners; they had expected to meet a middle-aged ruffian. Still, attacks by the two papers continued; only "The Manchester Guardian" and "The Daily News" were polite, though they too did not agree with Savarkar's views.

The furore occasioned by the 1857 controversy turned the attention of the British Intelligence Service on India House and its young men. This was the situation shortly before the advent of V.V.S. Aiyar in London in October 1907. But early in 1908, things heated up perceptibly. Senapati Bapat and Hemchandra Das and Hotilal Verma had reached India with copies of the Bomb Manual and distributed them among Indian revolutionary leaders in Maharashtra and Bengal. The first result of this action was the throwing of a bomb in Muzzafarpore, Bengal, on the 30th of April, 1908 by Khudiram Bose, a youth of barely nineteen. Aimed at the District Magistrate, Kingsford, it killed two unfortunate Englishwomen instead. Khudiram and his associates were arrested; one of them, Profulla Chakravarthy, shot himself dead in the police station and Khudiram was hanged.

The police rounded up among others Babu Aurobindo Ghose, who was suspected to be the brain behind the affair , his younger brother Barindranath Ghose was also active in the group. The Manicktola (Gardens) Bomb Case, also called the Alipore Trial, ensued and two associates of Khudiram were sent to the gallows and a large number of young men including Barindra were sent to the

Andamans. Lord Minto, the Viceroy, promulgated the Criminal Law Amendment Act; Lokamanya Tilak was deported to Mandalay in Burma and Shivram Pant Paranjpe, Editor of the "Kal", was sentenced to 19 months. The Approver in the Alipore trial had disclosed Senapati Bapat's connections with the Bengal revolutionaries and Bapat went into voluntary exile. But the revelation put Savarkar in London under strong suspicion, and the British police were hoping to get him behind the bars somehow. As Savarkar's chief assistant, Aiyar was also under a cloud.

At this time, Gokhale, the Moderate leader, was in London in connection with the Morley-Minto Reforms. Romesh Chunder Dutt, an ex-I.C.S. man, historian and scholar-turned-politcian, was also in London. Savarkar, Aiyar and Dr. Rajan went to see Gokhale and Dutt, to request Gokhale to preside over a meeting in London protesting against the deportation of Tilak. Gokhale declined to accept. The young men then discussed other things and the talk turned to the events of 1857. Savarkar pressed home his point that the history of 1857 needed to be rewritten from the Indian national point of view. Gokhale disagreed, but Dutt, the historian, cordially approved the idea.

Though Gokhale had refused to preside, a meeting was held in Caxton Hall to protest against the arrest and deportation of Tilak.

A more solid result was the impetus given to Savarkar to prepare a national history of 1857. He had for some time now been writing a Marathi book on 1857 and he went on to complete it with renewed zeal. The book was intended to inspire his people "With the burning desire to rise again and wage a second and successful war to liberate their Motherland". The book was expected also

"to place before the revolutionists an outline of a programme of organisation and action to enable them to prepare the nation for a future war of liberation. It would never have been possible to preach such a revolutionary gospel publicly throughout India or carry conviction so effectively as an illumination of what had actually happened in the nearest past would do. So he (the author) invoked the warriors of 1857 to deliver his message through their mighty words and deeds."

Savarkar's book in Marathi was sent secretly to India, but leading press owners in Maharashtra refused to take the risk of printing it. At last when one member of Abhinav Bharat, who was a printer, came forward, the police got wind of it and searched his press. Luckily, getting a prior hint, the press owner had all composed matter destroyed and the manuscript was again returned to Savarkar in London.

It was thereupon decided to get the book translated into English and publish it in Europe. V.V.S. Aiyar was put in charge of the work. He got together a band of Indian students studying law and preparing for the I.C.S. to do the initial translation and then revised their English work thoroughly. In the final outcome, the language of the finished book was mainly that of Aiyar. It was given the title "The War of Indian Independence, 1857."

The printing of the English version of the book also had its difficulties. When it was sent to France for printing thanks to English pressure, no printer came to accept it. It was then sent secretly to Holland, then the printing capital of the world, while keeping up the pretence that Savarkar was still searching for a printer in France. At last the book was printed and hundreds of copies were sent out to India under such innocuous dust-jackets as "Pickwick Papers", "Don Quixote" and Sir Walter

Scott's novels. Many leading publicists and politicians, libraries of colleges and members of Abhinav Bharat who had access to military camps in India received copies of the book.

After it had thus been quietly distributed in India, the book was openly released in France and free copies were sent to eminent men in British public life. English historians as well as revolutionary circles of Ireland, France, Russia, America, Turkey and Germany thus became acquainted with a true picture of the events of 1857.

Several subsequent editions of the English book appeared in later years, and the book became a handbook for members of the Gadar Party of Sikh revolutionaries who tried to migrate to Canada in a ship but were prevented from landing. Bhagat Singh, the revolutionary hero of Punjab, published an edition in India, and still later, Subhas Chandra Bose had an edition printed during the days of the Indian National Army for use by its members. It was also translated into Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and Tamil.

While thus the English and other language editions of the book were going strong, the Marathi original was nearly lost for a long time When Savarkar was arrested in London in 1910, the Marathi original was handed over to Madame Cama in Paris, who kept it safe in a locker in the Bank of France in Paris. But during the invasion of France by Hitler's hordes in 1940, the manuscript got misplaced and was given up for lost. Fortunately, in 1968 it was rediscovered.

The manuscript of the English original too had its vicissitudes. After the book was composed and printed, the manuscript was entrusted to D. V. Coutino, a member of Abhinav Bharat in London, from Portuguese India.

When things became hot in London, Coutino escaped with the manuscript to Portugal. Staying with friends in Chal et Felicia, Estoril, Portugal, Coutino was soon to help Aiyar in an interesting fashion.

After safely keeping the manuscript for thirty-eight years in the midst of his trials and tribulations as an Indian revolutionary in exile in Europe, Coutino returned the manuscript to Savarkar in 1947 when the ban on the book was lifted in India. The English manuscript which carries marks of Aiyar's thorough revision was added to the papers of Savarkar in Poona.

The last quarter of 1908 was a busy one from the Indian point of view in the British capital. Various missions were present in London and Indian leaders of varied persuasions were crowding into the city. G.S. Khaparde and R.V. Karandikar, friends of Tilak, were there regarding an appeal to the Privy Council against Tilak's conviction. Similarly, legal representives of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, who had been given a savage "Double Transportation for Life" sentence of 40 years, reduced on appeal to the High Court to Six Years Transportation, were making arrangements for an appeal to the Privy Council. Lajpat Rai and Sardar Ajit Singh had been deported from India under Bengal Regulations, and Lajpat Rai was in London.

The year 1908 was the fiftieth anniversary of the taking over of India by the British Crown and this was commemorated by a Proclamation by the King-Emperor, Edward VII. The Morley-Minto Reforms were on the anvil and the King-Emperor sought to assuage Indian feeling so as to prepare the way for the Reforms. Gokhale

had been called to London in this connection by Morley, Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet. Bepin Chandra Pal, the Extremist leader, recently released from a term of imprisonment, was also in London on personal business.

The Partition of Bengal, effected in 1905, was still a live issue and it was hoped that the coming Reforms would annul the unhappy division. An agitation for the purpose was being carried on in London also. Anti-Partition Day was observed in the city on October 16,1908 with a meeting presided over by Lajpat Rai, Bepin Pal, Khaparde, and Karandikar addressed it.

Another meeting was held the same day in the same hall by the India House group. Khaparde presided and Madame Cama spoke on "Boycott". Turkey was congratulated on having become a Republic. Moving the resolution on Turkey, V.V.S. Aiyar spoke. He was seconded by Sir Aga Khan, whose presence at an Extremist meeting was unusual. The principle resolution at the meeting advocated absolute Independence for India, expressing strong doubts about the forthcoming Reforms.

Nine days after this National Conference, the India House group organised another meeting, this time to celebrate the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh. Bepin Pal presided, and Lajpat Rai and Savarkar spoke citing Guru Gobind's bold resistance to alien domination as an example for young India to follow.

The British Press, forgetting that Britain established its own democratic rule at home only by violent means, took a hostile attitude to the India House young men. "Crush the Extremists!" was the cry of some in the jingoist section of the Press.

An incident at an officially organised meeting to discuss the restlessness of Indian youth in London added fuel

to the fire. At this meeting, Sir Lee-Warner, a one-time terror to the Princes in India, spoke desparagingly of an Indian leader Kunjuvihari Bhattacharya, describing him as "a dirty nigger". Vasudeo Bhattacharya, one-time Editor of the revolutionary paper "Jugantar", who was in the audience, immediately rose and struck Lee-Warner a blow in the face. The incident created quite a stir. Vasudeo was fined the equivalent of Rs. 20. India House thus became the talk of the town because of Vasudeo's connection with it. Even the sedate London "Times" said Government must take great care to control education and be very careful about the people whom it appointed to teach the youth in India. Another paper, "Standard", wrote, "It is beyond question that not a few of the highly intelligent Indians in our Universities and those reading for the Bar are striving their utmost by such means, particularly, to accustom the minds of the young rising generation to the idea of an armed revolt."

Scotland Yard now intensified its watch over India House. Not being able to gain anything by mere shadowing of the young men, the Yard decided to plant one of their own men in India House. The first of them was Kirtikar, a young man from Maharashtra aged thirty, who wormed himself into Savarkar's confidence and almost revealed all secrets to the Yard.

Kirtikar had been chosen specially; he was recruited in India as he was a Maratha and could gain Savarkar's confidence on that score. He was a Translator in the Bombay High Court and knew four or five Indian languages. He was to use this asset to follow discussions in the Indian languages in India House, a thing that the British intelligence men could not do. Kirtikar came to India House unannounced in the summer of 1909. He

came bag and baggage and talked to Savarkar in Marathi. He had no letter of introduction, but said he was from a Marathi aristocratic family and had come to London to study dentistry. Actually, the authorities in India had given him a year's leave and advised him to pretend he had gone to London to study dental surgery.

Kirtikar talked Savarkar into accepting him as a regular lodger in India House. The very next day Kirtikar registered himself in a London hospital for the study of dentistry.

Recalling the Kirtikar incident, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan has said that Kirtikar was an unimpressive person. He used to take his breakfast with Rajan and leave along with him, each for his hospital. But as days went by, Kirtikar started to laze in bed, coming late for breakfast and missing his attendance at his hospital. As though this was not enough, he started coming late in the nights, absenting himself most of the evening. He had begun to get into the confidence of the English maid of the House!

Dr. Rajan complained to Savarkar, but the latter dismissed it as the normal behaviour of an aristocratic young man. The maid's outings increased, and preparation of food in India House suffered; the lodge was not swept well nor were things cleaned regularly. It was finally decided that the maid should be sent away.

Kirtikar's interest in the girl did not diminish. he fixed up a room for her near India House and maintained her at his own expense. He continued to stay in the House and even started participating more actively in its activities. He became a member of the Free India Society, attended its meetings regularly, spoke occasionally, and gave a monthly donation of one pound in addition to his subscription.

Some months passed. One day Dr. Rajan accidentally

happened to enquire at the London hospital about Kirtikar. He was shocked to learn that Kirtikar had attended only the first week after enrolment and stopped going after that. This was intriguing and Rajan informed Aiyar. It seemed obvious that Kirtikar had not come for studies. Further observation revealed that Scotland Yard was not trailing him, while the others were being scrupulously followed.

One day Kirtikar went to a play with his English girl friend. Utilizing the occasion, Aiyar opened his room with a false key and made a thorough examination. In Kirtikar's box was discovered a report that he evidently had prepared for sending to the British police. The report was all about the week's meeting held in India House.

Aiyar took the report and locked the room. He showed the report to Rajan and Savarkar. It was now clear that Kirtikar was a police spy, planted to ferret out the secrets of India House and report them to Scotland Yard. They discussed what they should do with him. Several solutions, from summarily doing away with him to just ejecting him, were considered. Ultimately it was decided that they should take advantage of his presence and utilize it to their own advantage. For, even if they sent Kirtikar out, the Yard was sure to plant another man in his place and it might take a long time for them to discover him. The best thing to do was, therefore, to allow Kirtikar to continue in India House and send his reports to Scotland Yard, but to make him submit everyone of his reports to Aiyar for scrutiny and approval or modification before being sent.

That night when Kirtikar returned to India House, Aiyar entered his room with a loaded revolver in his pocket. Opening the conversation with innocent enquiries about the evening's play, Aiyar led it to Kirtikar's work in

London. Kirtikar maintained his pretence, but Aiyar suddenly told him they knew all about him and spoke contemptuously of the life of an informer. Still Kirtikar kept his pretence and disclaimed all connections with the police, he said he would never have the courage to be an informer ! Aiyar bolted the door, whipped out the revolver and pointing it at Kirtikar said, "This is no ordinary revolver. It takes six shots at one loading and is powerful enough. I have come to do away with you unless you tell the turth. If you speak the truth, I shall not harm you."

All the while Dr. Rajan was waiting outside the bolted door, prepared for any contingency.

Aiyar then took out Kirtikar's report from his pocket and said, "I know this is your handwriting It has been prepared by you for sending to the police. I opened your box and got it. Now what do you say? If you still presist in pretension, you will meet your end here right away at my hands."

Kirtikar knew he was cornered, he fell at Aiyar's feet and begged for life. Aiyar said he would spare him on one condition, he was to continue living in India House; he was to continue to send his reports to the police; but he was to show every report to Aiyar before sending it and Aiyar would censor it. Further, as long as Kirtikar was in London, he was to give two pounds every month as donation to the Free India Society.

Kirtikar was in a fix, unless he agreed, his life might not be safe, and if he did not continue his reports to the police, he would not only be left in the lurch in distant London but also be incurring the wrath of the British authorities. The way out seemed to be to accept Aiyar's bidding and keep up the pretence with the British police and other authorities.

Kirtikar stayed in India House many more months after this, and strictly followed the terms of the agreement.

A few months after the Kirtikar episode, another young man arrived one day unannounced. He too came with all his belongings, a box and a bed. He was thin and emaciated, with a very intelligent face and sharp eyes. He seemed to be twenty. He said his name was M.P. Tirumalachari, and that he had come by third class by ship from India. He said he was a Tamilian from Triplicane, Madras city. He had come with no assured source of income and was urgently in need of a job. He added he had worked as Manager of the "India" Tamil weekly, both in Madras and in Pondicherry and had through its columns come to know of the India House patriots. He wished to join them.

Was Tirumalachari a genuine guest or another police agent ? Aiyar and Dr. Rajan wanted to be careful.

Actually, Tirumalachari had been impetuous in coming to London. All that he said about himself was true, though Aiyar and Dr. Rajan did not know it then. After "India" weekly had been well established in Pondicherry, its owners, S.N. Tirumalachari and S. Srinivasachari, were planning to visit Europe along with the paper's Editor poet Bharati, leaving the paper in complete charge of M.P. Tirumalachari. M.P. Tirumalachari felt hurt because he was left out. Before the others could finalise their plans, he resigned his job and scraping what money he could muster left for London by the earliest ship. He had read about Shamji Krishna Varma and his munificence ; he had thought Shamji had created a big fund for helping Indian patriots, and had hoped to gain his assistance once he was in London.

M.P. Tirumalachari's unexpected departure upset the plans of Bharati and others. They never made the trip

to London or Europe.

M.P. Tirumalachari told Dr. Rajan that he was prepared to do any work, even, cooking or menial service; all that he wanted was board and lodging. As they needed a man in India House to help in the cooking and shopping and to supervise the maintenance of the place, Aiyar decided to try M.P. Tirumalachari, keeping a watchful eye over him. Even if he was another police agent, was it not better to keep him within sight?

Two months of probation revealed Tirumalachari as a genuine patriot, selfless and outgoing. He did more than he was told. In addition to helping in the kitchen, shopping and maintenance, he also helped in the work of the Free India Society. He proved an asset to India House. But since he had to be maintained by the permanent seven of the House, out of their contributions, a way out had to be found soon to meet his expenses. Soon Aiyar discovered one.

From the large sums they were willing to spend on Kirtikar, it was clear that British authorities would go to any expense to know more about India House. They might also like to get corroboration for Kirtikar's report from a different source, so that they could know to what extent they could rely on him. Arguing in this fashion, Aiyar had Tirumalachari go and see the high-ups in Scotland Yard and offer his services to them. The astute Tirumalachari met the top brass in the Yard and told them he would tell them all that was going on in India House. He was only a poor cook without means and expected to be paid at least five pounds a month; if his information was useful, they should double the payment.

The Yard fell into the trap. Week after week, Tirumalachari met top officers of the Yard and told them what Aiyar had advised to reveal, mostly confirming

what Kirtikar had been permitted to say. Tirumalachari, for good measure, also took a lot of innocuous letters and clippings from the Indian Press and handed them over to the Yard men.

Aiyar did all the preliminary work with Kirtikar's report and Tirumalachari's statements and material. It was a very happy arrangement all round, India House gaining its money and Scotland Yard pleased as Punch with the fully corroborated "information" it was getting! An expert in laying false trails, Aiyar put enough stuff in Kirtikar's reports and Tirumalachari's revelations to keep the Yard off the real track. The patriotic Tirumalachari surrendered all that he got from the Yard; this not only met his board and lodging but also provided some extra funds for the Free India Society.

IV

MADANLAL DHINGRA

As days sped by, the young men in India House felt that it was time they equipped themselves better for their projected role as revolutionary heroes. One day Dr. T.S.S. Rajan told V.V.S. Aiyar, "We talk incessantly of ending foreign rule in our country, by armed revolution if necessary. We talk of guerrilla warfare and of the examples of freedom fighters in other countries. Isn't it time we take some more practical steps towards our goal?"

"Such as?" asked Aiyar.

"Military training," replied Rajan. "We must familiarise ourselves with modern methods and weapons of warfare."

Aiyar smiled and thoughtfully said, "I agree it is imperative that we learn the use of arms even while we are here in England. Though warfare and the use of weapons are nothing new to our land, our founts of patriotism and armed resistance have dried up due to historical exigencies. We had heroic men, fearless and courageous. But they lacked unity and a central patriotic feeling. We must inculcate that feeling of oneness and intense love for the country; we must give our people military training to resist foreign rule by armed revolution. We must first learn military training ourselves. But how? Although there are many institutions in England to give armed

training to its citizens, we are refused admission as black men. Savarkar and I applied for membership of the shooting range near our House. We were not admitted. So we learnt revolver shooting in the gambling houses where prizes are offered for shooting at targets. It has been quite costly. But this is the price we had to pay because of our bond of slavery."

"Let me try. Where you have failed, I might succeed," said Dr. Rajan, and the next day he went to the shooting range, somehow paid the admission fee and even practised shooting for an hour. That night he gloated over the fact. Aiyar was pleased.

But on the third day, Rajan got a money order returning the admission fee paid by him, less the fee for one day's practice! It was politely regretted that he could not be enrolled as a member. No reasons were given. It was obvious that Indians, and especially those connected with India House, were anathema.

Dr. Rajan was furious. After some thinking, he evolved an alternative plan. There were many polytechnics in London, and one of them conducted by the London County Council aimed at teaching all kinds of technical subjects to the poor of the city. Cooking, hair-cutting, laundrying, and photography were some of the subjects taught. Shooting was also taught. Dr. Rajan, to make his entry innocuous, joined the photography class. The fees were low and classes conveniently held in the evenings. After some time as a photography student, Rajan applied for joining the shooting class also. As he was already a student of the institution, he was admitted without any objection. Soon he became more expert with the revolver than the camera.

But then wars are not won by revolver shooting; one has to learn the use of fire arms, undergo drill and other

physical training, and gain a sound knowledge of formation of platoons, battalions, armies and divisions, and their movement, supply, logistics, tactics and strategy. How were they to fight a battle for India's liberation without knowledge of warfare as such? They must somehow get practical training in the art of warfare.

An opportunity came their way in 1909. The Moors in Morocco were then fighting the Spanish rulers there. Aiyar decided that three young men from India House should be sent to Morocco to join either the Moors or the Spaniards whoever was willing to give them military experience. Money was collected for sending the three men, and M.P.T. Acharya, Chota Dutt (brother of Ullaskar Dutt of the Alipore Bomb Case) and Khan, a young Muslim member of Abhinav Bharat, were selected for the training. At great expense, guns were procured, uniforms were stitched and a hearty send-off was given.

Seven hopeful months went by. One evening, two of the three "generals" returned. Their looks were depressing; they were emaciated and worn out; they did not even have the strength to carry their guns; their uniforms were unkempt and dirty. They told the sordid tale that neither side wanted their service, as both of them suspected they might be agents planted by the opposition. Neither the Moors nor the Spaniards were willing to allow them to join even as ordinary soldiers in their ranks. The only result was the passage of seven months and the expenditure of dear money to the tune of three hundred pounds, not to mention the physical suffering undergone by the three volunteers.

While the young men of India House were thus trying one thing after another to prepare themselves for a military uprising in India, the British police were also assiduously continuing their attempts to penetrate the secrets

of the House. The year 1908 saw the arrival in London of two Indians who were to prove very useful to the police in landing Savarkar in jail and in sending Aiyar into the wilderness.

One was Rama Rao, a Sanitary Inspector of Rangoon Municipality, who had come for higher studies in his field. The other was Harischandra Goregaonkar, who had come for studying engineering with a monthly stipend of 20 pounds from Gwalior State. Dr. Rajan had known Rama Rao even in Rangoon. Goregaonkar was a stranger.

Rama Rao saw Dr. Rajan, who introduced him to Aiyar. Aiyar's inspiring friendship made Rama Rao a patriot. He attended India House meetings regularly. Goregaonkar was a short dark man of twenty-three, with sparkling eyes and thick lenses. He was a Maratha. Like Kirtikar, he became very intimate with Savarkar soon enough. He was an impressive talker and when he narrated the life of Shivaji, he would move the audience to tears. He held long talks with Savarkar, and turned over to the Free India Society the best part of the 20 pounds that he received each month.

At this time, the British Press was mounting an onslaught on Shamji Krishna Varma, who was considered the key figure behind India House. "The Times" took the lead and published many letters attacking Shamji and suggesting that the political views expressed by him were unworthy of a barrister; the Inner Temple was urged to remove him from its rolls and withdraw recognition to him as a barrister.

The Inner Temple executives met on April 30, 1909 and passed a resolution holding Shamji's writings objectionable and withdrawing his name from its rolls. This decision was circulated to all Courts.

Pandit Shamji did not depend on practice as a barrister for his living, but a principle was involved. He wrote a long letter to "The Times" in which he said this decision was "pleasing to both the accusers and the accused", but it affected freedom of opinion and freedom of thought. No one had pointed out what exactly was objectionable in his writings: they were obviously coloured by the India Government's prejudices against him.

"I would, therefore, urge only one plea," said Pandit Shamji. "Just as it would be proper for an Englishman to rebel for freedom were England to be conquered by an invader, so do I expect it to be the bounden duty of the Indian people to rebel for their freedom. My view has been well supported by other barristers like Edmund Burke."

Shamji also quoted his teacher Herbert Spencer for the view that India was held only by military might and that India existed only for Britain's welfare. Another barrister, the late Robert Wallace, M.P , he pointed out, had actually said that the people of India would not be considered human beings, leave alone civilised persons, until they drove out the Britishers. He further drew their attention to the fact that the names of Boer barristers from South Africa had not been removed from the rolls although they had fully supported the rebelling Boers at the time of the Boer War.

"To die for one's country," Shamji observed, "is noble and sweet, according to Horace, the Roman poet. I consider this act of the Inner Temple only a great honour done to me."

In conclusion, he added that he might have to consider removing India House, a non-profit organisation for the welfare of Indian students in London, to Paris.

These events proved a fitting backdrop to a sudden climax in mid-1909.

On the 1st of July 1909, London was electrified by news of a daring political assassination right in the heart of the city.

Lt. Col. Sir Curzon-Wyllie, A.D.C. to the Secretary of State for India, was shot dead by a young Indian student Madanlal Dhingra. Captain Cawas Lalkaka, an Indian medical man, who tried to grapple with the assailant, was shot at and died on the way to hospital.

The incident occurred outside a public building, where several hundreds of people had gathered. There was nothing furtive about it, the boldness with which it had been executed staggered everyone.

The scene of event was the steps of Jehangir Hall of the Imperial Institute. The London Indian Association had arranged a gala get-together, with a dinner and a musical concert. Three hundred persons had gathered, mostly Indian students. Important officials connected with Indian student welfare and European and Anglo-Indian friends of the Indian students were also there.

It was about eleven in the night. The dinner, arranged in the Savoy Hotel next door, was over and the concert that followed was coming to a close. Sir Curzon-Wyllie, an important guest of the evening, was leaving for home along with his wife. As he was descending the flight of steps, his wife remembered she had forgotten something, and went inside.

As Sir Curzon-Wyllie was coming down the steps alone, a young student, Madanlal Dhingra, already well known to him, approached with what looked like a greeting. As he drew near, Madanlal emptied five shots from a revolver held in his hands. The first four were ineffective; the fifth hit Sir Curzon-Wyllie on the head and smashed it. He fell down dead.

Capt. Cawas Lalkaka, who was accompanying Sir

Curzon-Wyllie, rushed at the assailant. A sixth shot from the revolver hit him in the chest.

One of the guests, named Thorburn, pinned Madanlal to a chair with the assistance of another person. Madanlal freed his right hand and drew the revolver against his head and fired. The weapon was empty and no shot came. He was again over-powered. In the melee, Madanlal lost his spectacles and they were restored to him at his request. As the attempt to kill himself failed, Madanlal gave up all resistance and was calm and quiet. He asked for his right hand to be freed so that he could set his spectacles right; his right hand was freed, he set his spectacles right, but made no effort to escape or hit anyone Thorburn felt his pulse and found it, surprisingly enough, absolutely normal. While all around were agitated, Madanlal seemed to be the only unperturbed person there.

On hearing the noise of the shooting incident, a tall British lady came out to see what was happening. Seeing an Englishman fallen headless on the ground, she exclaimed "What a pity!" and bent over the body It took her some time to discover that the dead man was her own husband. Lady Curzon-Wyllie's sobs were heart-rending.

The police arrived on the scene and took Madanlal into custody. Another revolver, a knife and a dagger were also found on him. He was taken to Walden Street Police Station.

Madanlal Dhingra the young Indian, was 26 and had only the previous month passed his degree course in Engineering with first class from the University College, London. He came from a Punjabi Kshatriya family of Amritsar. His father, a rich landlord, was a loyal Indian. Madanlal had two elder brothers, both London-educated,

one a barrister in Lahore who had just then come to London, and the other a doctor in India.

Before coming to study in London, Madanlal had been in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaya. In London, he was an exemplary student. But his love of his Motherland and his Hindu ancestry were deep-rooted. At the time of the Golden Jubilee of 1857, he had worn the "Martyrs of 1857" badge and as a result got into a scrape with some British students of his college.

Madanlal was a person of great grit. He was a frequenter of India House, and one day when someone told him that the Japanese were the bravest in Asia, he flared up and said the Hindu nation was no less brave. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan then pointed out that the Japanese were walking into the mouths of guns and meeting bayonet charges without flinching. "Mere bravado is no good. Leave alone guns and bayonets, will you withstand without flinching a pin driven into your palm?" Without the slightest hesitation, Madanlal said yes. It was left to Aiyar to administer the test. Madanlal laid his palm on the table and Aiyar took a needle and sent it piercing through his hand. The needle point went right through and touched the table. But Madanlal did not even wince. Aiyar has mentioned this incident in one of the many Press dispatches he sent at the time to the "India", Tamil weekly of Pondicherry edited by poet Bharati.

Madanlal had asked Savarkar some time before the assassination of Curzon-Wyllie if the time had come for martyrdom. Savarkar had replied that if a martyr was ready, it itself implied that the time had come. This seems to have acted as a green signal to Madanlal, who thereupon joined an aristocratic English club and made friends with highly-placed Englishmen. Madanlal wanted to do away with Lord Curzon, the autocratic Viceroy

responsible for the Partition of Bengal, who was on a visit to London. But opportunity did not occur and Madanlal decided to do away with another ignoble Britisher, Sir Curzon-Wyllie.

When Madanlal's effects were searched at his residence in Ledbury Street, a personal notebook in which the usefulness of shooting with firearms was reported to have been noted, was taken away by the police. They also searched India House and seized a large quantity of nationalist pamphlets and some letters. The press where Shamji Krishna Varma's journal "The Indian Sociologist" was printed was also searched.

Shamji who was living in Paris sent a letter to "The Times" denying he had anything to do with the shooting. But he added that he considered Madanlal Dhingra a martyr to the cause of his country. If Englishmen continued to do injustice to India, he warned, there might be another ghastly event which would shock the world.

A Press representative of "The Pall Mall Gazette" went to India House and found the establishment almost closed. There was a solitary Indian student whose name was not given; he said Madanlal was a lodger nine months earlier and had then left. He was not known to be interested in politics then.

On July 2, Madanlal was taken to the Westminster Police Court and charge-sheeted. After the police made their statement, the magistrate asked Madanlal if he would like to cross-examine them. Madanlal shook his head and added that he had no intention of killing Capt. Lalkaka; he had to shoot him in self-defence. The case was adjourned for a week.

The next day, July 3, a meeting of the Indian community in London was held, Babu Surendranath Banerjee presiding. Speakers dissociated themselves from the crime, and

a resolution was passed condemning it. On July 5, another meeting, a bigger one, was held at Caxton Hall, with the Aga Khan presiding. As before, several speakers condemned Madanlal Dhingra. But trouble started when the chair proposed a resolution stating that the meeting unanimously condemned Dhingra. A loud voice in the crowded hall shouted, "No, not unanimously." The Aga Khan asked, "Who says no ?" "I do," came the reply. "Your name, please," the chairman asked. At this some persons lost their head and shouted, "Pull him down! Drive him out!" Someone ran menacingly towards the interrupter. The lone man stood his ground despite all the commotion, and defiantly said, "My name is Savarkar."

This was a like a storm signal to the crowd. Was it likely that the revolutionaries were there ready to throw a bomb or two? Feelings ran high, confusion ensued, and a Eurasian named Palmer stuck Savarkar near the eye. His spectacles broken, and clothes smeared with running blood, Savarkar reiterated, "With all this, I am still against the resolution."

M.P.T. Acharya who was standing near Savarkar gave a thrashing to Palmer who went down reeling. Aiyar who was also nearby was about to shoot Palmer, but Savarkar winked and restrained him.

In a letter to "The Times", Savarkar said that he objected to the resolution as it damned Dhingra who was still only an accused undergoing trial. Further, the matter was *sub judice.*

The assassination of Sir Curzon-Wyllie was the talk of the town. In clubs, in meetings, in trains, in Parliament, everyone discussed it. Loyal Indians trembled at the anger of official Britain. Madanlal's father and elder brother disowned him and expressed their loyalty to the British!

But Madanlal stood firm. At the preliminary trial, he expressed the hope that he would be sentenced to death, as it would add a keener edge to his countrymen's desire for vengeance. Scorning all advice to feign madness, he made an extempore statement in which he said, "Just as Germany has no right to occupy this country, so the English have no right to occupy India. It is perfectly justifiable on our part to kill the Englishmen who are polluting our sacred land. I am surprised at the terrible hypocrisy, the farce and the mockery of the English people."

Madanlal had prepared a written statement which he kept in his pocket even at the time of the assassination. But this was suppressed by the police. It was made public by friends after he ascended the gallows.

Committed to the Sessions, the trial was held at Old Bailey. Lord Alverston, Chief Justice, conducted the brief trial. Madanlal offered no defence, but only wanted his written statement to be placed on record. The police continued to deny any knowledge of the statement. The Court sentenced Madanlal Dhingra to death.

When sentence was pronounced, Madanlal said, "I thank you, sir. I feel proud that I am giving my insignificant life for the good of my country."

Savarkar saw Madanlal in Brixton Jail. Madanlal said his only last wish was that he should be cremated with Hindu rites and that no non-Hindu should be allowed to touch his body. His clothes and belongings were to be sold and the money given to the national cause.

When Madanlal was awaiting the execution of his sentence, leading London papers discussed his case. "The Review of Reviews", an influential monthly, and "The London Evening Gazette", a daily, urged that a life sentence was more appropriate than death. They suggested

postponing the carrying out of the sentence. "The Times", however, was hostile, and blamed Savarkar as the brain behind all the troubles.

The Madanlal incident affected the lives of Aiyar, Savarkar, Dr. Rajan and others in India House considerably. Savarkar passed the Final Examination for barristership in Gray's Inn, but the Inn Benchers declined to confer the degree on him. On appeal, it was said the degree would be conferred if Savarkar would give a written undertaking not to participate in politics. Savarkar, naturally, refused; he never took his degree. Aiyar too was to face a similar situation later.

After the Curzon-Wyllie assassination, India House was closed temporarily, fearing attacks by hostile elements. Savarkar, Aiyar and Rajan stayed with friends for some days. The friends were criticised for harbouring them. So they went in search of lodgings elsewhere. Day after day they wandered from hotel to hotel, lodge to to lodge, with little success. Because of the Dhingra episode, hotels and lodges were afraid of taking in Indian students.

While Aiyar and Rajan stayed back in London with some other friends, Savarkar, who needed rest badly, went to Brighton, the famous sea-side resort. There too he was not quiet he got printed Madanlal Dhingra's written statement suppressed by the police, and sent it to the English papers as well as to those in Ireland and America. English newspapermen ignored it; but a sympathetic Irish Assistant Editor of the famous "Daily News" of London inserted it in the paper when he was on night shift. The statement appeared the day after Dhingra was executed.

Madanlal Dhingra ascended the gallows cheerfully on August 17, 1909.

"The Daily News" report said: "Large crowds had gathered outside the Pentonville Jail before Dhingra's execution. It is noteworthy that not even a handful of Indian students could be seen in the crowd. As the clock struck nine, the Under Sheriff came out of the prison. When asked how the sentence was carried out, he said, 'Everything went on all right. Death was instantaneous.' The petition for handing over the dead body for cremating it was turned down. Dhingra's body will be buried inside the jail itself, according to usual practice."

Madanlal's written statement was also given in full by the paper. The statement admitted to his having "attempted to shed English blood as a humble revenge for the inhuman hangings and deportation of patriotic Indian youth." He had consulted no one else, and carried out the deed on his own, as his own duty. A nation in bondage, he said, was in a perpetual state of war. Since open battle was rendered impossible to a disarmed race, he had attacked by surprise; since guns were denied him, he had drawn forth a pistol. As a Hindu he felt that a wrong to his country was an insult to God; his country's cause was the cause of Sri Rama, her service the service of Sri Krishna. Poor in wealth and intellect, a son like himself had nothing else to offer to the Mother but his own blood. The lesson India had to learn was to know how to die, and the only way to teach it was by dying oneself. Therefore, he died, and gloried in his martyrdom. The war of independence would last so long as the unnatural relationship between India and England lasted.

Concluding his statement, Madanlal said, "My only prayer to God is, may I be reborn of the same Mother and may I die again in the same sacred cause till the cause is successful and she stands free for the good of

humanity and to the glory of God. Bande Mataram."

The execution of such a noble patriot like Madanlal Dhingra had its echoes even in British circles. Irish papers printed huge placards saying, "Ireland honours Mr. Dhingra who was proud to lay down his life for the sake of his country." In England, prominent politicians expressed their admiration. The English author W.S. Blunt in his book "My Diaries" (part II, p. 288) mentions that Lloyd George told Winston Churchill that Dhingra was a great patriot; Churchill agreed and added that Dhingra's last words were among the finest ever made in the name of patriotism.

On Aiyar's life, Dhingra's sacrifice left an indelible imprint; he too would offer his all for the Motherland. It was another turning point in his life.

V

AIYAR'S LONDON LETTERS

AMONG THE activities of the Free India Society run by Savarkar and Aiyar at India House was press propaganda in favour of Indian independence. Members were expected to carry out at least one deed for the country each day. They were expected to maintain a diary and this would be checked periodically by the Society elders. Writing letters to editors of newspapers in England and other countries, writing letters and articles and sending news reports to papers in India, and keeping correspondence with sympathetic patriots all over the world were part of the duties of the members of the society. Physical exercise, horse riding, motor driving, boxing and wrestling and shooting practice were also considered national service by the Society.

V.V.S. Aiyar devoted himself to journalistic writing in English and Tamil, as part of his Society duties. His main outlet in Tamil was the "India" weekly in Pondicherry, French India, edited by rebel poet Bharati. Aiyar had contributed on the life of Garibaldi and other items, besides a regular weekly London Letter, as already noted. The weekly London Letter became more and more important in the weeks following the Curzon-Wyllie assassination. It was a good peg to hand all kinds of news and information upon, and to goad Indian readers to a better understanding of their selfish British masters.

Aiyar noted the surge of interest in the Curzon-Wyllie incident exhibited by the London Press and sent extensive comments from British papers interspersed with observations of his own. Madanlal's shining example was held before India for the young to emulate.

But the political climate in India was not all in favour of armed resistance to the British. Constitutional methods were still favoured. Editor Bharati of "India", for example, abhorred violence. He did not condone political assassination, and his support for armed rebellion was not explicit.

But Bharati respected Dhingra as a patriot, though he did not agree with Dhingra's methods. Bharati gave ample space in his weekly to news about Dhingra, and Aiyar had a field day expatiating on the various aspects of the Dhingra incident. But the Editor and contributor disagreed openly on one occasion, and this led to Bharati leaving the paper, because the proprietor of the paper was on the side of the contributor and in favour of Dhingra's action.

This was how it happened.

Nine days after the assassination of Curzon-Wyllie, Bharati wrote an editorial critical of Dhingra, in which he said : "We very much regret to hear of the assassination of Sir Curzon-Wyllie and Dr. Lalkaka. Both in England and India, political parties are blaming one another for the event. But there is no fool anywhere who believes that a nation's longings will be fulfilled by such madness."

But Bharati permitted in his news columns free scope for Aiyar's dispatches from London, which were published weekly as "Our London Letter." Among the earliest of these letters to mention Dhingra was the following dispatch published in "India" of August 28, 1909 :

"The Dhingra episode has not yet gone out of the people's mind here in London. Both 'The Pall Mall Gazette' and 'The Evening Standard' had posters the other day, one saying 'Is Dhingra mad?' and the other 'Letter from Dhingra's father.' Both papers had larger sales that day.

"The letter written by his brothers to the Lt. Governor of the Punjab and his father's letter to the Secretary of State for India, both disowning Dhingra, have been published here. The first letter has disgusted both Indians and Englishmen alike for its gross betrayal of brotherly love and shameless fear of authority. The father's letter tried to prove Dhingra mad because he ran away from home and in boyish prank cut the whiskers of a cat. But who will consider him mad who has seen his behaviour in Court and outside ever since the event?"

Then follows a detailed report of the trial, with Dhingra's extempore statement getting prominent attention. The Letter pointed out that Madanlal coolly thanked the judge when the sentence of death was pronounced, and remarked: "Will one who talks in this fashion and behaves in a dignified way in prison be a mad person? If he is dubbed mad, we can only say he has the same madness as that of Lord Krishna who killed Kamsa, of Shivaji who killed Afzal Khan, and of William Tell who killed the Austrian Governor."

In the same August 28 issue of "India" was another Letter sent after Dhingra was executed. It said:

"Dhingra had asked the authorities to cremate the body. But they refused to accede to his last wish. While they bury the dead in England, the Hindu custom is to cremate them. All that Dhingra had asked was that his body be consigned to the flames according to his own religious practice. The authorities refused. Agni, the

Lord of Fire, was ready to receive as oblation the body of this divine son of India. But, denied of this, Agni got annoyed and razed to the ground in a huge fire a cotton mill in Glasgow, swallowing material worth two lakh and fifty thousand pounds sterling. Perhaps in Agni's view, Dhingra's body was worth that much!"

This gloating over a fire in Glasgow was not to Bharati's taste. In an editorial note next week, Bharati wrote: "Last week a Correspondent of ours had written about Madanlal Dhingra. We do not endorse his views. In his letter, the Correspondent had by some reckoning evaluated Dhingra's life at two and a half lakh pounds sterling. He had also expressed pleasure at the big fire in Glasgow.

"Will Dhingra come back alive if the Glasgow mills are burnt down? What use is this fire to the people of India? Why should we imagine the fire in Glasgow is the Lord of Fire's vengeance for the execution of Dhingra? The Aryan people do not gloat over such small things. The bombs and terrorist violence, unknown to our land, are all uncivilized. These are the outcome of the British Imperialists' feudal laws and actions. All the world does condemn the British for not gracefully conceding the dying wish of Dhingra."

This forthright comment from the Editor brought to a head the smouldering differences between the Editor and the owner of the paper. There were arguments over ideological differences and Bharati relinquished his editorial charge of "India" Tamil weekly. This was a tragedy for the nationalist cause, for lesser men took over and the paper lost its elegance though it gained a reputation for violent attacks on the British.

Aiyar in far-away London was not aware of the storm in the tea-cup that he had unwittingly created. He

continued to send his weekly letters, giving it a new format and a new title. It was presented as an open letter to "Desabandhu" (Lover of the Country) and the writer signed himself variously as "Desabhaktan", "Bharata Sevakan", and "Bharata priyan." The letter was titled "Swatantarya Lakshmi Prasannam" (The Advent of the Goddess of Freedom).

The first of the letters under the new format, published in the "India" of September 11, 1909, spoke of Madanlal Dhingra's last days in jail. According to jail officials they had never seen such a well-behaved prisoner like him. He was said to have spent his last days in reading spiritual books. He showed the least concern about his impending end, but only spoke of the country. A request by a friend to see him so that he could give last-minute spiritual consolation in the Hindu manner was turned down.

The letter also mentioned two interesting facts: one was that four or five days before Dhingra was hanged, his written statement that had been suppressed by the police was printed in a circular titled "Challenge" and widely distributed in England and America. Obviously this was Savarkar's work. The other thing was the incident in which some months earlier Dhingra had permitted a pin to be sent through his palm to show his unflinching courage.

Aiyar's letters of later weeks gave news of other developments in London as they affected India House.

One letter denied that India House had been taken over by the police and that no Indian student lives there. It said students still live there and the House is in charge of Mrs Shamji Krishna Varma. It also mentioned that Shamji had received anonymous warnings that he might be attacked, even in Paris.

Four days after Dhingra was hanged, Guy Aldred, printer of "The Indian Sociologist", Shamji's paper in London, was arrested. Aldred was only 22; he had openly stated that he was an Anarchist Communist. He had undertaken to print the paper although he knew full well that the previous printer was jailed. The socialists had taken cognisance of Aldred's arrest and were expected to contest the case as one involving the freedom of the press.

Mentioning all this, Aiyar added in his Letter : "Freedom of the Press is an invaluable right to be protected for the proper functioning of Government. Unless this right is fully protected, the people will not be able to safeguard themselves, and the Government will be able to perpetrate any atrocity. Unless the people have the fullest right to enquire into and discuss matters disposed of or action taken by Government, the Government will day by day turn tyrannical. A bureaucracy has all powers in its hands. It is capable of shoving responsibility for its own mistakes on others when it is exposed. Unless there are men and papers who will fearlessly enquire into the actions of the bureaucracy, there is no doubt that it might steer the State into unjust paths. Hence the jealous safeguarding of the Freedom of the Press in England and America..."

Freedom of thought is not anything new to India, Aiyar pointed out and quoted from the ancient Tamil poet Tiruvalluvar to prove this. This poet, who is placed in the first century after Christ, in his didactic work "Kural" speaks of the essential qualities of a prince, and observes: "Behold the Prince who hath virtue to bear with words that are bitter to his ear; his subjects will never leave the shadow of his protection."

Aiyar's London Letter published in the "India" of

Septemebr 25, 1909 mentioned the sending of three Indian young men to Morocco to get military training. The full story of this trio has already been told in this book earlier.

The Letter published in "India" in its issue of October 9 mentioned the possibility of Indians colonising in Brazil in South America. This letter was one of Aiyar's preparations for throwing the British police on a false scent about his further movements.

After tracing the cause of famine in India to British rule, the Letter said : "The real cure will be to oust the British and establish our own rule. But in the meanwhile other plans for improving our lives might also be tried. Earning a living in foreign countries is a time-honoured method known to us. But as we have so long gone out only as coolies, we have undergone many travails. The cry of misery has been heard from Ceylon, Mauritius, Jamaica, Natal and Transvaal. But we are unable to do anything about these just now except vow revenge and bide our time.

"The Anglo-Saxons have not captured the whole world. There are many countries where one can live without being bothered by them. Let our people not be frightened by the thought that these countries are new to us. The countries to which we are arranging for our people to migrate as colonists are populated by humanitarian persons who are considerate to all men. In these countries, particularly Brazil, each colonist is given 10 acres of land and a loan for starting agriculture. This loan is repayable in ten years in small instalments. Those who go with wife are given 25 acres and a loan commensurate to that. They are also given the right to elect Government officials. There are other facilities also.

"In order to conduct the colonising on a systematic basis, an Association has been formed. The Association

has got into agreements with the Governments of these countries. The Association is expected to make all arrangements including the sending of ships to Indian ports to fetch colonists and paying them rail fare to reach the ports from their homes. It is my request that our patriotic men of India should think well and send our people, who are dying by famine, to these new lands. Those who want to know further about this may write to : Deshbandhu, J.x.o. Coutino, Chal et Felicia, Estoril, Portugal."

The colonising of Brazil by Indian immigrants was not a fake scheme, there was a real plan for that. But whether Aiyar had any idea of joining the immigrants to Brazil is doubtful. Aiyar had, besides this news letter, also sent letters to his people in Tiruchi asking them to get a number of families ready for emigrating to Brazil. His people were really worried about him. We shall see soon how all this was part of Aiyar's well-thought-out plan to return home, throwing dust in the eyes of British intelligence men.

VI

AIYAR MEETS GANDHIJI

On the battlefield there is no place for grief nor relaxation. Every soldier girds up his loins and carries on the battle forward not tarrying to shed a tear for a fallen comrade. Similar was the attitude of the India House group after Madanlal's martyrdom.

Soon after his execution, residents of India House reassembled in India House, and started again their weekly meetings of the Free India Society. Two months later they decided to celebrate Dussehra, which they considered was a national festival. The festival is celebrated all over India and it symbolises the victory of justice and truth over injustice and untruth, the victory of Durga over the buffalo-headed *asura* Mahishasura. In some parts of India the festival is considered the victory of Sri Rama over Ravana. Nine days of penance, during which all aspects of the Mother Goddess—Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Durga—come into play, is followed by the tenth day of victory, Vijaya Dashami. To the patriot, learning, wealth, and heroism had all to be put in the fight before one could gain victory.

Happily, in 1909, Vijaya Dashami fell on a Sunday, October 24. It was decided to have a dinner followed by speeches. After being disappointed by some of the Indian leaders then present in London, a comparatively unknown young leader, Barrister M.K. Gandhi of South

Africa, was asked to preside.

Aiyar's London Letter on this event reports : "On the 24th of October a function was arranged here for Dussehra. Sri M.K. Gandhi was asked to preside over it. Sri Bepin Chandra Pal was invited. The invitation letter said there would be a dinner and after that flowers would be offered to Sri Ramachandra and Bharat Mata. Sri Pal was much upset that no toast to King Edward VII was to be given. He asked the organisers why there was no toast to the King. They asked in return what connection Dussehra had with the King. Sri Pal was silent. But he did not attend the function. He did not send his son either..."

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a barrister practising in South Africa, had shot into prominence by his new technique of non-violent satyagraha which he had successfully used to make the South African Governments bend their knees before public opinion. Though Gandhiji was successful, the Whites went back on their promises and he had to renew his fight. He was arrested and imprisoned for three months. After release Gandiji led an Indian delegation from South Africa to meet British leaders and to create sympathy for their cause. General Botha and General Smuts, two South African Government leaders, were also in London at the time. Gandhiji reached London on July 10, and left on November 13, disappointed.

During his sojourn, Gandhiji met British statesmen and journalists, as well as Indian leaders visiting London. Aiyar located Gandhiji, after being disappointed in searches in some big hotels, in a small house in a narrow lane, the house of an Indian who was running an Indian eating-house. There in a small room, with two or three chairs and a worn-out carpet on the floor

on which lay a rolled-up bed, Gandhiji, dressed in European clothes, received Aiyar all smiles.

Aiyar told him of the object of his visit. Gandhiji, without saying yes or no to the invitation, discussed the ideological bases of the Indian struggle for freedom. Gandhiji argued the greatness of non-violence and Aiyar argued its futility and the necessity for violence. The two spent some time thus, and Aiyar said he would bring Savarkar to meet Gandhiji. Gandhiji was also eager to meet him and his friends.

Though Aiyar would not agree with Gandhiji on non-violence, he was greatly impressed by Gandhiji's sincerity and frankness. That night when Aiyar returned to India House, he told Dr. T.S.S. Rajan that he had met "a very noble person, unrivalled in human creation." Gandhiji had captivated Aiyar so much.

The next day Savarkar met Gandhiji, and for three days they doggedly argued their respective ideologies. But neither could convince the other. Savarkar in vain tried to persuade Gandhiji to drop his non-violence. Gandhiji equally doggedly sought to wean away Savarkar from violence. The bravery and dedication of the India House young men impressed Gandhiji, but he felt their zeal was misdirected. Regarding Dhingra, Gandhiji observed, "Those who believe that India has gained by Dhingra's act and other similar acts in India, make a serious mistake. Dhingra was a patriot, but his love was blind. He gave his life in a wrong way; its results can only be ruinous."

"Poor Gandhi," Aiyar told Rajan, "he is obstinate even after four days of argument. His faith in ahimsa is like a superstition. But his conviction about the need for heroic effort to gain freedom is genuine. Only his belief that ahimsa alone will be successful in the political sphere is pathetic."

Notwithstanding this fundamental difference, India House pressed Gandhiji to be the chief guest at the Dussehra celebrations. Equally, Gandhiji overlooked the differences and agreed to come. But he stipulated certain conditions for his coming.

"What is the object of the celebrations ?" he asked.

Aiyar told him that there were some seven hundred Indian students in England. Mostly sons of rich parents. they had no thought of their own country and were busy aping Englishmen. Dussehra was an excuse, a fit occasion, to get them all together and instil in them some thought of their Indian nationality. There were to be a dinner and some speeches. Every participant would pay for the dinner.

Gandhiji appreciated the idea but said there was no point in their meeting and eating in an English hotel. If they would give some significance to the occasion and arrange Indian vegetarian food, he would readily agree to be the chief guest.

"This is a difficult proposition, cooking Indian vegetarian food for so many. However, we shall do as you suggest," said Aiyar.

A big hall was hired and enough utensils were gathered. Six volunteers including Dr. T.S.S. Rajan and M.P.T. Acharya, undertook to do kitchen work. Aiyar attended to various items of work, mainly outside jobs. Gathering the provisions and condiments for the dinner was a time-consuming task. Aiyar had to go from shop to shop to procure them, as, unlike today, Indian food ingredients were not easily available in London then.

On the day before the dinner, Aiyar went to see Gandhiji to remind him of the engagement. He told him the dinner was at 7.30 p.m.

Kitchen work was started early on the day of the

dinner. At one o'clock itself, Dr. Rajan and others busied themselves. Rajan was the chief cook, and he was assisted by another young man. The work went on slowly because of their inexperience.

About half an hour after they had started, a person lean of frame and unobtrusive in manner, came in and joined them. He looked like a middle-aged person. Despite his emaciated body, he was most enthusiastic in doing even the most arduous tasks. Since they had invited a large number of Indian students from all over England, he was taken to be one of the unknown invitees. His enthusiasm made rough-cut Dr. Rajan order him about in his brusque way to do this and do that. Washing the tub, rinsing the plates and vessels, cleaning the rooms, cutting vegetables, bringing water in pails—he was bidden to do all this and he joined the others in doing them with the least compunction. He was even anticipating work to be done and doing it by himself without waiting for any direction. They were all very appreciative of this "poor visitor from India", as someone described him.

It was six o'clock in the evening when Aiyar returned from his outings. He peeped into the kitchen with the question, "Is everything all right ?" Imagine his surprise when he saw the "poor visitor from India" strenuously engaged in some work. Somewhat nervously he asked, "Who asked him to help you in the kitchen ? Don't you know...?" Before he could finish the sentence, Dr. Rajan answered he did; the gentleman was the most enthusiastic of them all, he added.

Aiyar was very much upset. "Don't you know that he is our chief guest—Barrister M.K. Gandhi ?"

They were all very much embarrassed. Dr. Rajan sheepishly apologised to Gandhiji. Aiyar added his

profuse regrets. But Gandhiji was all smiles.

"What have I to excuse and whom? I am the first culprit. I have put you all to some strain. It is I who should apologise for suggesting this vegetarian dinner and its preparation by yourself. But the fact that young men like you have all come forward for this sort of work fills me with pleasure."

Despite all their efforts to stop his doing further work, he continued to help in the preparation of the dinner. He took his seat last at the dinner table, only after all the plates had been arranged and food had been served.

After dinner, there were speeches. In a brief speech as chief guest, Gandhiji mentioned his difference in ideology with Savarkar and added it was, however, important that they should all gather together like this on such occasions to kindle a feeling of oneness and love of their land. He stressed the greatness of ahimsa and added that it was India's greatest gift to the world. Savarkar, who followed, made one of his best speeches. He said he did not wish to stress their differences, but only wished to emphasise that as sons of India with a glorious past and now wallowing in mire, it was their duty to do all they could for the freedom of their land.

Gandhiji in 1909 was not much of a speaker. Savarkar was a born orator. Hearing their speeches that day, the young men who had gathered were all praise for Savarkar. The India House inmates felt that if Gandhiji was exposed to a few more speeches by Savarkar, he would give up his ahimsa and join them !

Gandhiji, for his part, was unmoved in his convictions. A month later, while returning to South Africa by ship, he wrote the Gujarati version of his noted seminal work "Hind Swaraj", in which, in the shape of dialogues between the author and the reader, he stated all the points

of all those who believed in violence and answered them with his arguments for non-violence.

Aiyar met Gandhiji for a second time some six years later, in Pondicherry in French India. The revolutionary and the apostle of ahimsa had a further round of talks. This time it was Aiyar who was converted. Aiyar became a devotee of Gandhian non-violence. A third meeting between the two took place in 1924 when Aiyar attended the Belgaum Congress presided over by the Mahatma. A fourth meeting took place between them early in 1925 at Vaikom in Kerala, when Gandhiji's intercession was sought in a controversy about Aiyar's "Tamil Gurukulam" residential school. That was their last meeting.

VII

SAVARKAR'S ARREST AND AFTER

India House continued to be strictly watched by the London police following Madanlal's martyrdom. Round the clock surveillance did not give them any clue which would implicate Savarkar or others.

Guy Aldred, printer of Shamiji's penny monthly "The Indian Sociologist", was arrested, and another printer met the same fate. Shamji thereupon moved the paper to Paris.

The British police were trying their best to trace the printer of the pamphlet which had carried the suppressed statement of Madanlal Dhingra. All that they could make out was that it had been printed in French types which were slightly different from English types, and they guessed it must have been done by Shamji in Paris.

The India House inmates took the police surveillance in good humour. Asked if he did not feel annoyed by the shadowing plainclothesmen, Savarkar told a pressman, "I have no objection to their standing there in the open, day and night, hail, rain or snow, if the climate suits them."

While things were going on in this fashion in London, the Government in India was busy harassing Savarkar's relatives and friends. Savarkar's father-in-law was dismissed from service, his younger brother Narayan Savarkar, a young lad of seventeen, was incriminated in

the bomb attempt to kill Viceroy Lord Minto in Ahmedabad. Ganesh Savarkar, his elder brother, was convicted, and held in Nasik jail on a charge of abetment for waging war against the King. He was sentenced to transportation for life, which meant his spending the rest of his life in the Andamans.

This news nearly wrecked Savarkar's health. Added to it was the difficulty of constant police shadowing. Aiyar and other friends nursed Savarkar tenderly, and on medical advice removed him to a sanatorium in Wales in charge of an Indian doctor. In less than a fortnight of his arrival in the sanatorium, one evening Savarkar noticed in an evening daily the news which said, "Ananta Kanhere, a Chitpavan Brahman youth, shot dead A.M.T. Jackson, Collector and District Magistrate of Nasik, to avenge the sentence of transportation on Ganesh Savarkar."

Several friends in Nasik were also charged with conspiracy and waging war against the King. European-owned papers in India were crying for Savarkar's blood, as they held him to be the mainspring behind all these activities. They asked why the British Government was still allowing Savarkar to go free.

Convalescing Savarkar knew his time had come. His friends advised him to cross the Channel and go to Paris. Shamji and Mme. Cama advised likewise. The Executive Council of Abhinav Bharat formally passed a resolution requesting him to go to Paris forthwith as his safety and health were most essential for their cause. Savarkar, however, was unwilling to run away. He returned to London. Abhinav Bharat met again and implored him to leave for Paris. Finally, he agreed. That was the last meeting of Abhinav Bharat that Savarkar attended.

Savarkar reached Paris with an escort, and was

welcomed by Shamji and Mme. Cama. After some time, Aiyar made a trip to Paris to consult Savarkar on some urgent and confidential matters of business. He found Savarkar fretting and fuming to return to London. He was mentally tortured by the fact that while his near and dear ones were being brutally treated in jail, he was safely esconced in Paris. Whatever had happened had happened in India, and he had nothing to do with it. But, London would provide him scope for fighting on behalf of the accused in India. London was famous as having given asylum to many exiles and revolutionaries. Orsini, the Italian revolutionary who shot Napoleon III, Karl Marx, the German Socialist and Father of Communist Theory, and many others had lived in London unmolested. London should be safe for him also.

But Savarkar forgot that British treatment of fellow white men was different from their treatment of brown Indians on whose wealth the Empire was fattening!

Brushing aside the advice of elders like Shamji, Savarkar took the train to Calais and crossing the Channel entrained for London. As the train neared London, he noticed he was being closely followed. As he alighted on the platform in London, a bunch of detectives in plain clothes rushed shouting, "There he is, Savarkar." He was held fast and taken to the waiting room in the station where a warrant for his arrest was read out. He was then formally taken into custody.

The arrest of his leader found Aiyar a very busy man in London. Aiyar knew that he too might be on the list next, but with the sword of Damocles hanging perilously on his own head, he took upon himself the task of

making all arrangements for the defence of Savarkar. He fixed up a Solicitor, one Mr. Vaughan, to conduct the case for Savarkar and wrote to friends in Paris for funds.

Savarkar was arrested on March 13, 1910 as he alighted at Victoria Station, London, on his return from Paris. He was taken into custody on a telegraphic warrant from the Government of Bombay which advised his arrest under the Fugitive Offenders Act. The charges against him were five : one, waging war or abetting the waging of war against the King; two, conspiracy to deprive His Majesty of the sovereignty of India or part thereof; three, procuring and distributing arms and abetting the murder of A. M. T. Jackson, Collector of Nasik; four, procuring and distributing arms in London and urging war from London; and five, delivering seditious speeches in India in 1906 and in London during 1908 and 1909.

After preliminary hearings at the Bow Street Police Court, Savarkar was refused bail and sent to Brixton Jail on March 20. Aiyar met Savarkar in the lock-up on March 15 and in Brixton jail later. Having made arrangements for Savarkar's defence, he wrote to Shamji :

81 Clarendon Road,
North Kensington, West,
15th March, 1910

Dear Panditji,

I am most grieved to have to write to you that our dear Savarkar has been arrested as soon as he got down from the Express train, on charges of abetment of murder and sedition in India. I would have written to you yesterday but I thought I should wait till I saw Savarkar today. I send you a cutting from "The Daily Telegraph" which will tell you accurately what happened in Court yesterday.

A solicitor was appointed and he conducted the case yesterday. He told me that if proper counsel was appointed, the trial can be made to take place here when, of course, his innocence can be established beyond a shadow of doubt. Any legal point that occurs to you please send me, so that I might instruct solicitor and barrister properly.

This morning I saw Savarkar and he was the same as ever except that we had to converse through the iron bars. But I felt it deeply—too deeply—that he whould be interned in the English jail. A lion in the toils of his hunter! He said the Jail Superintendent, etc., treated him with due attention and care and that he had nothing to complain under the circumstances. I know you as well as Mrs. Shamji would feel so much to find that but the day before yesterday he was with you safe and today !... There is no use crying over spilt milk. We must do our best to see that he is not sent to India. If once he is sent, we shall see no more of him and one of the dearest and most devoted sons of the Motherland would be rotting away in cells of a malarious island. It was pathetic when Savarkar said this morning, if he were to be taken to the Andamans, he would have the happiness of seeing his elder brother. I hope that melancholy sort of happiness will not be his, but that he will be released and will work out the salvation of his country according to his lights.

My Vande Matarams to Mrs. Shamji and all friends.

We are collecting funds for his defence. I request you to send any moneys that you intend to contribute towards the Fund to me.

The total cost would be something near £ 200 as far as it appears at present. Vande Mataram.

V. V. S. Aiyar

Pandit Shamji Krishna Varma's reply was immediate. He wrote the same day :

March 15, 1910

Dear Mr. Aiyar,

I cannot express in words how deeply I feel for our dear young friend Mr. Savarkar who has been suddenly taken away from us by the oppressors of our country. You can well imagine my consternation when I tell you that it was against my solemn advice that our devoted compatriot returned to England and my chagrin is all the more because we did not see each other nearly a week before he left Paris.

I enclose a cheque for 10 pounds to be used for the benefit of Mr. Savarkar in any way you like but I may be allowed to express a hope that it will not be wasted on lawyers.

Yours sincerely,
Shamji Krishna Varma

Savarkar's arrest so soon after Madanlal Dhingra's martyrdom had an electric effect on Aiyar. The iron had entered his soul. He was a totally new man. The role Destiny was preparing him for was now clear to him. His dedication was complete.

In a matter of three more months he would be completing his study for barristership and would be called to the bar. Was he going to become a barrister, when barristers like Shamji Krishna Varma and Savarkar had been taken off the rolls for their political views ? Was he going to take the oath of allegiance to the King whose overthrow in India was their cherished goal ? Was he going to lead an affluent life when comrades like Savarkar were to languish in the Andamans ?

When Aiyar saw Savarkar in Brixton Jail, the latter discovered such a change in Aiyar that it left a lasting impression on his mind. Aiyar was vastly different from what he was barely two months earlier. Writing in 1925, at the time of Aiyar's death, Savarkar has given a remarkable picture of Aiyar's change. Recalling their first meeting in 1907 in India House when Aiyar appeared a dandy with no thought for the country, Savarkar contrasted this with the picture of Aiyar of 1910. Savarkar wrote :

"In 1910, somewhere in March, we stood as a prisoner, then only very recently pent up in Brixton—the formidable prison in London. The warder announces visits, anxiously we accompany the file of prisoners to the visiting yard. We stand behind the bars wondering who could have come to call on us and thus invite the unpleasant attentions of the London police. For to acknowledge our acquaintance from the visitors' box in front of the prison bars was a sure step to eventually getting behind them. The visitors are let in. They crowdedly pass past our window. Presently one dignified figure enters the box in front of us. It was V. V. S. Aiyar. His beard was closely waving on his breast. He was unkempt. He was no longer the neatly dressed fashionable gentleman. His whole figure was transformed with some act of dedication of life. 'Oh leader!' he feelingly accosted us. 'Why did you leave Paris at all.' We soothingly said, 'What is the use of discussing it here.' Rightly or not, I am here, pent up in this prison—and the best way now is to see what is to be done next, how to face the present.

"While fully discussing the future plans, the bell rang and the warders came running and shouting unceremoniously, 'Time is up.' With a heavy heart we looked

into each other's eyes. We knew it would perhaps be the last time we ever saw each other in this life. Tears rose. Suppressing them, we said : 'No ! No ! We are Hindus. We have read the *Gita*. We must not weep in the presence of these unsympathetic crowds.' We spoke in Hindi, curious crowds of Englishmen watched the young Indian rebel and his friend. We parted. I watched him till he disappeared and said to my mind, 'Alas ! It is well-nigh impossible to see this loving soul again.' For, one of two fates was certain to my lot, the gallows or the Andamans, and neither could hold any prospect before me of seeing my friends again."

Anticipating history, we may add here that the impossible actually happened: fourteen years later, when both of them were free men in India, Savarkar and Aiyar met in Ratnagiri and parted with fond hopes that they could thereafter meet as often as they liked—only to be baulked by dire fate which took away Aiyar most unexpectedly in June 1925.

The case against Savarker dragged on in the British courts through the whole of April, May and June 1910. Aiyar writes about Savarkar to Shamji Krishna Varma :

4th April 1910

Dear Panditji,

The case is still dragging its weary length along. The papers are not yet arrived from India and so dear Savarkar and his friends have to bear the suffering as they can every day. Some friend or other is going and visiting him and he is as cheerful inside the jail as he was when out. Necessary books and papers are given to read. The papers from India would reach here on Saturday and would be in the hands of the Magistrate after all the delays of red tape on Wednesday 13th

instant and it is only then that we can get copies from the Court.

Deshbandhu Savarkar wants me to request you if you will pay the balance of his scholarship so that he might send it along with what little he has here to his brothers' wives; and they might be kept above anxiety for some time at least. If you send the money to me, I shall send the receipt for the same and do with the same as Desh. Savarkar directs.

He also requests you to send at your earliest convenience the scholarship that you have been so kind to offer to Desh. Chattopadhyaya. No man deserves your help than Desh. Chattopadhyaya both by the service he is rendering to Bharat Mata and the deep love he has always had for her...

I remain, yours sincerely,
V. V. S. Aiyar

The Chattopadhyaya referred to is Virendra Chattopadhyaya, a brother of Sarojini Naidu, the nightingale of India, and of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. Virendra became a well-known revolutionary, went to Russia, and disappeared without a trace.

The papers of the case, when they arrived, had a nasty shock for Savarkar and his supporters. They contained the deposition of Harischandra Korgaonkar, who was an enthusiastic member of the Free India Society and India House in 1908-9, betraying the secrets of the India House patriots. In a 120-typed page statement, Korgaonkar who had turned approver, threw all blame on Savarkar and Aiyar for enticing Indian students in England into the path of revolution.

A second shock was the deposition by Chencheri Rama Rao, who had come from Rangoon to London for higher studies in sanitary engineering. He had stated that it was Savarkar who had given him some revolvers to take to India. This was absolutely untrue.

Rama Rao, who was known to Dr. Rajan in Rangoon, saw Rajan and Aiyar in London and became a good friend of them both. On the completion of his studies in a year, Rama Rao had returned to India. On his return journey, Rama Rao stayed for a week with Aiyar in Paris. At that time Aiyar had prevailed upon Rama Rao to take with him a few revolvers to be handed over to a contact in Bombay. Providing Rama Rao's box with a false bottom, Aiyar had packed the revolvers in it and saw Rao through the customs at the French end. But when the ship arrived in Bombay, the Indian authorities examined Rama Rao's box and unearthed the revolvers and arrested him. He was given two years in jail.

A weakling, Rama Rao, broke down under the rigours of jail life. He had been brave and patriotic in Aiyar's and Rajan's company; in jail, he became a willing tool of officialdom. The Indian authorities wanted to establish that it was Savarkar who had sent the revolver that was used to shoot Jackson in Nasik. But they had no evidence. It was here that Rama Rao came in handy. He was made to depose that the revolvers found in his box were put there in London by Savarkar. For this atrocious lie and betrayal, Rama Rao got pardoned and got a job in the Indian Police Department.

Despite Aiyar's efforts to keep Savarkar in England, the Bow Street Police Court ordered on May 12, 1910 that Savarkar be taken to India to stand trial there.

Savarkar's counsel Vaughan made a Writ of Habeas

appeal in the Divisional Court against his being sent to India. It came up for hearing before Chief Justice Vaughan Williams on June 2 and was heard the same day and the next. The Chief Justice upheld the decision of the Police Court.

A further appeal was made before the Court of Appeal. Again, Chief Justice Vaughan Williams, speaking for the majority of judges, upheld the decision to send Savarkar to India. Justice Coleridge was the sole dissenter.

In India, a Special Tribunal was meanwhile created by a Special Ordinance for Savarkar's trial. A Special Tribunal meant there would be no jury and there could be no appeal against its findings. It seemed inevitable that the gallows or the Andamans were the sure fare for Savarkar.

While the legal battles were being waged, Irish friends of the Indian revolutionaries mooted some daring schemes for the rescue of Savarkar from custody. Two plans were thought of. One was that an Indian could see him in prison and take his place in jail after helping him to escape. Acting in concert with Irish friends, an elaborate plan was devised which involved some desperate things. But the plan did not succeed. Then the second plan was put into execution. It was to waylay the police van taking Savarkar to and from Court.

Friends of Savarkar lay in ambush one day waiting for the van to come. But somehow the van that they waylaid turned out to be empty. Savarkar had been taken in another vehicle. These unsuccessful attempts at rescuing Savarkar are narrated by the novelist David Garnett in his autobiography titled "The Golden Echo". Garnett, when a college student, had befriended Indian students in London.

Although these two attempts had failed, Aiyar and others were planning other schemes to rescue Savarkar before he could be taken to India. Aiyar was writing cheering letters to Savarkar whenever he was permitted to do so.

By June 1910, Aiyar's study and preparations for enrolment as a barrister were over. The original purpose for which he had come was now completed. But Aiyar was a different man now. When the time for his being called to the bar came, Aiyar firmly refused to take the oath of allegiance to the King, whom he would not recognise as the king of his country, India. He would rather not be enrolled a barrister, if it came to it. His decision was irrevocable; he had dedicated himself completely to the cause of Indian freedom.

Aiyar's friends were now considering how best to utilise his talents for the cause of the country. Lala Hardayal wrote to Sardar Singhji Rana regarding the possibility of Aiyar editing "Bande Mataram", the journal published by Indian revolutionaries in Paris.

But Aiyar's mind was pre-occupied with Savarkar.

On June 21, he got a letter from Savarkar in prison. Affectionately addressing him as "Rishi", an epithet that suited Aiyar both because of his nature and because of the bushy beard that he was sporting, Savarkar in the midst of all the gloom found it possible to make fun of Aiyar's beard. The letter said :

Brixton Prison,
OM 21st June, 1910

Shree Swatantarya Lakshmi Prasannam !

My dear Rishi,
You must have received by this time two letters or

three. Please do acknowledge them. The case does not seem to end today. Of course, both of us know the result already. Tomorrow the formal result will be given.

By this time, My dear Rishi, I have got quite used to the food and mode of living here. It was good that I did not ask for special food from the beginning. Now to make me a full-fledged life transportee, only a change of clothes is wanting...

I am in excellent health and have added two pounds to my weight (not by growing a four-pound weight beard !). I am sure you will be glad to hear it. Be writing to me the sort of ennobling letters which you have written so many times. One of them I got while just starting for the court to hear the foregone decision of them. It makes me forget all the distance between us and makes me feel as if my Rishi is with me side by side in a meeting or in the room nursing me or chatting with me on the exalted topic of the raising of the people, the rebirth of a race and Rao Saheb.

Brotherly yours,
V. D. Savarkar

VIII

VIKRAM SINGH AND RUSTUM SAIT

On June 29, 1910, the British Government informed the French Government that in two day's time, on July 1, the ship S.S. MOREA would be leaving London for India with an important political prisoner. The French Government's help was sought to guard against his rescue by Indian revolutionaries and their friends on the Continent. The prisoner was Savarkar, and the British Government, having sensed the attempts to rescue him in England, wanted to take all precautionary measures.

Another of these precautionary measures was the issuance of an urgent warrant for the arrest of V.V.S. Aiyar. He was too dangerous to be still left free.

Aiyar was no longer living in India House; he had been living in different places on different days to evade arrest. British intelligence men and police combed all London for him. At last they discovered him lodging in a hotel. During the night, secret servicemen occupied positions with a view to whisking him away before dawn. Aiyar somehow scented the danger enveloping him. At midnight, he quietly left the hotel, taking with him the barest necessities in a small suitcase. Among these were the volumes of Kamban's Tamil Ramayana, the literary work so dear to him. He would not part with it even in such a perilous strait.

The disappointed British police flashed an alert to all

their men on all routes by rail and sea going out of London to keep a lookout for "the South Indian Brahmin Revolutionary V.V.S. Aiyar." They expected him to go to Paris and so the Dover-Calais ship route was most carefully watched.

But Aiyar had already left them guessing in other directions also. He had left them wondering if he would not go to Brazil for permanently colonising there. For some time now he had been writing letters home to India eulogising the Brazil scheme and expressing his intent to go there. He had further asked for their sending other south Indian families to Brazil. His letters home were being intercepted and the British intelligence men were keeping a watch on the routes to Brazil also.

The British police were left with a third guess as well. Aiyar had given Dr. Rajan a bunch of letters written by himself with different dates on them, to be posted at intervals of time by Rajan at some postbox in London. By this ruse, Aiyar wanted the British police to wonder if he was still not somewhere in London in hiding. This ruse worked so well that they believed he was only in London. But, to be on the safe side, they were alerting their men on the Paris and Brazil routes also.

While thus the police and their agents were concentrating on London and the routes to Paris and Brazil, Aiyar quietly took a ship to Amsterdam. The route to Holland was not keenly watched. However, an intelligence man on board ship had his own doubts. He had also received the alert about "the South Indian Brahmin Revolutionary". He had ruled out all persons on board except one bearded gentleman who looked like a Punjabi Sikh. He was well-built, had a strong athletic form, a broad intellectual forehead, a bold nose, with the majestic beard adding to the arresting personality. Was he Aiyar? Not

likely. Was not Aiyar a South Indian Brahmin, that race of typically thin, small men, more brain than brawn?

To fix the identity, the detective handed Aiyar who was reclining on a deck chair a fake telegram addressed to V.V.S. Aiyar. Aiyar took the envelope, looked at the address and without batting an eyelid handed it back saying, "But this is for Aiyar, not me."

The answer would have been accepted at once, had not Aiyar's suitcase borne the intials V.V.S. inscribed on it. Pointing to the letters on the box, the detective looked at Aiyar with a questioning eye. Aiyar just smiled and said, "Yes. I am Vir Vikram Singh from the Punjab."

Abashed, the British sleuth apologised profusely and retired.

Aiyar arrived without further trouble in Amsterdam, and after seeing to it that he was not followed, quickly took a train to Paris. At the French capital, Shamji Krishna Varma and Madame Cama were awaiting his arrival. They had a lot to do. The ship carrying Savarkar was expected in Marseilles harbour in south France a few days later. They had a rendezvous to keep with it at Marseilles!

The ship S.S. MOREA which left London for India on July 1, 1910, developed some engine trouble and had to steam into Marseilles harbour on the evening of July 7. Savarkar had told his friends in London and through them informed those in Paris that he would make a bid for escape at Marseilles. He would escape from the ship and gain the harbour; his friends were to wait for him and take him away as soon as he reached the pier.

The fact that the ship's engine had developed trouble was lucky. It would be in Marseilles for some more days.

On the night of July 7 that the ship steamed into

Marseilles Savarkar was revolving in his mind his plan of escape. He had noted, while visiting the ship's toilet, that there was an open porthole in it wide enough for his lean frame to squeeze through. If he could do that he could get out of the ship. As the porthole opened out on the sea, he would have to jump into the waters of the harbour. Savarkar prepared himself mentally for all contingencies. That night he was restless, thoughts raged in his mind, doubts assailed him. Would the message have reached Shamji and Mme. Cama? Would Aiyar have reached Paris safe? Would they be there on the pier in Marseilles?

The next morning, July 8, Savarkar made up his mind to effect his escape.

There were two police officers, one from London and one from Bombay, accompanying him on the ship. Early morning they were still asleep and a guard was on duty. Savarkar asked him to take him to the toilet. The guard woke up his sleeping companion and both of them accompanied him. They were still drowsy, and this helped Savarkar. He entered the toilet and silently bolted it from within. Clambering up he tried to go through the porthole. He could not do so with his clothes on. He threw away his night-gown and squeezed himself through the porthole. He was virtually naked. Being thin of build, he passed through the porthole. Once he was out, he took courage in both his hands and dived into the sea.

He swam fast towards the harbour pier. It was only then that by accident someone on the deck of the ship noticed him. Soon it was discovered that Savarkar had escaped and was swimming without clothes towards the pier. Two British marine guards jumped into the waters and came chasing him. But he was swimming for dear

life ; he outbade them and reached the steep end of the harbour. There he tried to climb up, went half way up once, fell down, and went up a second time, successfully. He clambered on the pier and started running. The British guards also came up on the pier and started chasing him, crying, "Thief! Hold him!" The sight of a clotheless man running and two guards chasing him drew a crowd. A French policeman stopped Savarkar and held him. The British guards caught up and asked the French policemen to hand over Savarkar to them. Meanwhile, Aiyar and Madame Cama, who had noted what had happened, came running to the French policeman, crying, "This is French soil. Don't let British guards arrest anyone on French territory!" Their pleas were in vain. The French policeman allowed the British guards to drag Savarkar away.

The action of the French policeman was most deplorable. It was against all canons of International Law. It was a matter of common knowledge that once a person was on foreign soil, he came under tbe authority of the Government of that country. And, political asylum was granted to political prisoners. Savarkar had freed himself from British custody ; he was on French soil, and had been caught by a French policeman. As a political prisoner, he was entitled to political asylum. The French policeman had no business to hand over Savarkar to British custody. Aiyar and Madame Cama were determined to fight this breach of International Law.

From Marseilles itself they wired the story to the French newspaper "L'Humanite", edited by a Socialist of repute. The paper flashed the story in its issue of July 12. Pandit Shamji Krishna Varma, Madame Cama and Aiyar, along with Sardar Singhji Rana contacted the Socialist leader M. Jaures, who also happened to be the

Mayor of Marseilles, and other influential Frenchmen for the release of Savarkar. M. Jaures took up the cause and demanded the return of Savarkar to French custody. Leading papers like "Le Temps", "Le Matin" and "L'Eclaire" added their support to the demand and raised a storm of protest against the illegal arrest of someone on French soil. In England, Guy A. Aldred, former printer of "The Indian Sociologist" who had come out of prison, conducted a raging campaign for Savarkar's release and formed a "Release Savarkar Committee".

The French Government under Prime Minister M. Briand, however, was not easily moved. M. Briand was hesitant to antagonise Britain which was considered France's best ally against the growing threat from Germany. But the continued storm of protests in France forced him to make a reluctant demand for the return of Savarkar. The British Prime Minister Asquith announced in Parliament in London that France had demanded the return of Savarkar. The London "Times" editorially observed that International Law was not clear on the right or wrong of an arrest under a situation like this: it was an incitement to Britain to hold on to its stand.

The Socialist Conference of Europe meeting in Copenhagen on September 10 demanded the return of Savarkar to France. The French Press resumed its campaign in support.

A fortnight later it was announced by the British Foreign Secretary that Britain and France had agreed to refer the matter to the arbitration of the International Court at The Hague. The case was to be tried by an Arbitration Tribunal consisting of legal luminaries appointed by the two parties to the dispute. The French Prime Minister avoided nominating anyone from a big country who

might take a hostile attitude to Britain. The Tribunal met on February 24, 1911 and contrary to expectations finished its work in less than eight days. Its decision shocked lovers of freedom : it gave a judgment in favour of Britain although it frankly admitted "that an irregularity was committed in the arrest of Savarkar (in Marseilles) and in his being handed over to the British Police."

As early as September 1910, Aiyar was heart-broken at the way things were moving. Savarkar had been taken to India and tried, despite his protests that his arrest on French soil was illegal and that he had been illegally brought to India. He was sentenced to a total of 50 years' penal servitude. Fifty years in the Andamans! More than enough for a lifetime!

While Savarkar's case was dragging on to its conclusion like a Greek tragedy, Aiyar's future was also looming large on the horizon. Aiyar was 29, had renounced his barristership, and become a marked man with a British warrant pending against him. He was safe neither in Britain nor in India.

Lala Hardayal, Indian revolutionary leader editing the journal "Bande Mataram" from Paris, was at this time planning to go to Japan and wanting to make alternative arrangements for editing the paper. Two names were considered by him : Virendra Chattopadhyaya and Aiyar. In May 1910, while Aiyar was still in London, Hardayal wrote to Sardar Singhji Rana, another revolutionary leader, on this question. "I hear," wrote Hardayal, "that Aiyar has bravely resigned his membership of the bar. I think he intends to live outside India. Now if you can secure him for the 'Bande Mataram' (failing

Chatto), that will be all right. He can also write well. For example, if you pay him something and also help him to start in life like Govind, he might stay in Paris. This is only a suggestion. You can think over the matter..."

A second letter expressed a final preference for Chattopadhyaya, but sought Aiyar's help in persuading Chattopadhyaya to accept. Hardayal wrote to Rana: "About the 'Bande Mataram' I have asked Madame Cama and Mr. Aiyar to ask Chattopadhyaya to undertake it...I have not written to him directly as I don't know him well at all. He is Mr. Aiyar's friend and Mr. Aiyar can arrange the matter easily."

Aiyar was not over-enthusiastic about remaining in Paris as a politician in exile. So he was only very glad to help procure Chattopadhyaya for the editorial job. However, since Hardayal changed his plans, the need for a fresh editor for the paper "Bande Mataram" did not arise. Correspondence on this score also reveals that Aiyar had been pressing Hardayal to edit the other journal "Talwar", also published by Indian revolutionaries in Europe. Hardayal had not then given a final reply, pending proper financial arrangements for printing the paper.

According to Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, Aiyar's closest confidant in India House, who has written his reminiscences of Aiyar, it seemed that Aiyar was feeling that nothing much could be achieved by him by staying on in Paris. He knew it was a great risk to go to India. But his heart was set on it. He discussed the matter with Madame Cama with whom he was staying. She approved of his return to India, though she did not fail to warn him of possibility of his having to face arrest if he travelled openly.

Aiyar decided to go incognito. But he was not sure where he could go in British India. Even in India he faced the prospect of arrest. All he could therefore decide was to "go underground" and face the future as it shaped itself.

The normal shipping route to India from France—Marseilles to Bombay, via Port Said & Aden—was fraught with danger. British agents were sure to be on the prowl there. Therefore, he must choose some other route, and, additionally, he must not give them the slightest inkling of his intent to reach India. Paris to India, by land or sea was a long way off. He would have to pass off as someone else. He had to perfect the art of simulation.

In the seclusion of Madame Cama's house, Aiyar quietly prepared himself. He lavished attention on his beard, and in a month or two it was a long, bushy appurtenance that changed his appearance greatly. He equipped himself with different types of dresses—that of a Parsi gentleman and of a pious Muslim merchant. From Madame Cama he learnt the Parsi prayers, and small talk and mannerisms peculiar to the Parsi role he was to adopt. From other friends he picked up the Muslim habits and prayers. As he was a linguist, he easily picked up enough words and phrases to maintain conversation in each of the roles he might adopt. No actor going on the stage would have taken as much pains as Aiyar did while preparing for his journey to India.

As the British were censoring all letters received by his people in India, Aiyar once again adopted the ruse of laying a false trail by writing to his father in India of his intention to settle in Brazil and asking him if he could not arrange to send with him one hundred hard-working south Indian families. Indian people, who were hard

working, were welcome in Brazil, and they could start a new life of freedom and prosperity there. For himself, there was no use his returning to India; he was sure to be arrested and sent to jail. He would rather be free and far away than rot in a jail in India.

As he had done before leaving London, in Paris also he wrote a number of letters in his own hand with advanced dates, and entrusted them to Madame Cama for posting week after week at a Paris postbox. That would keep the British agents lulled under the belief that he was still in Paris, preparing to go to Brazil.

Just as he expected, the British kept a tireless watch on the sea route to Rio de Janeiro, capital of Brazil, hoping to net their bird the moment it stirred out. While they were busy thus, one day, in Paris, a Parsi gentleman took leave of Madame Cama, a small bag in hand. He boarded a cab to the railway station and took a train to Rome. "Mr. Rustum Sait" spent some days in Rome sight-seeing.

Italy and Rome had their own fascination for Aiyar, who was a student of Latin. The poet Virgil was dearly loved by him; Horace was another. Not only Latin literature, but also Roman Law was familiar to him, as he had studied the latter while preparing for his barristership.

Rome and Tamil Nadu were ancient friends: Tamil kings of yore had had extensive trade with Rome. They had also exchanged diplomatic representation. Roman mercenaries had been in the employ of the Chola and Pandya kings of olden Tamil Nadu.

In recent times, the Italian heroes Garibaldi and Mazzini were the idols of Indian youth. Aiyar had written in Tamil the lives of these fighters for freedom.

Besides, the memorable buildings of Rome, the Eternal

City attracted Aiyar who was a keen student of all arts.

It was perhaps while in Rome that Aiyar finally made up his mind on his exact destination in India. In Rome Aiyar purchased a copy of Dante's "Divina Comedia" and an Italian-English Dictionary, both of which he sent without any accompanying letter to an address in Pondicherry in French India. No letter or note just an unsolicited parcel of an Italian book and a dictionary!

From Rome, "Rustum Sait" took ship to Constantinople in Turkey. On the way he was given unwelcome attention by a person, possibly a spy hoping to get a clue. Aiyar shook him off by busying himself with his account notebooks and by loud arithmetical calculations in an unknown tongue. His visiting card in Urdu proclaiming him Rustum Sait was ever ready; but there was no need to use it.

Reaching Cairo by ship from Constantinople, "Rustum Sait" slipped into the old city, to the address of a friend. He spent a few days in sightseeing and in getting a visiting card printed in Persian characters with a Turkish name on it. Aiyar was no more Rustum Sait, the Parsi gentleman; he was a pious Muslim dervish returning from a pilgrimage to the Haj.

Aiyar took a ship in which there were many other pilgrims returning from the Haj. He spent his time constantly reciting or reading the Koran, and performed namaz five times a day on the ship's deck. He avoided small talk, and was considered a venerable fakir.

In Bombay, a local Muslim met the "fakir" and took him along. Some days later, the same "fakir" boarded a ship bound for Colombo, again immersed in his prayers. In Colombo he was shadowed by a sleuth, who however gave him up soon as another religious fanatic. Aiyar was handing out a visiting card which said he was a big merchant in Calcutta.

The ship anchored off Cuddalore on the way from Colombo to Calcutta. Aiyar alighted from the ship, took a boat to Cuddalore and from there engaged a jutka horse cart to Pondicherry nearby. He was still in Muslim dress, fez cap and all.

In Pondicherry, Aiyar called at the house of Mandayam Srinivasacharya, the owner and publisher of the "India" Tamil weekly. When Aiyar called, the poet Subramania Bharati and Srinivasacharya were conversing on the first floor of the house. Srinivasacharya's daughter opened the door and after enquiry called out, "Father, there is some Muslim gentleman to see you." Srinivasacharya came down wondering who the unexpected Muslim gentleman could be.

Aiyar's very first words were, "Did you get the copy of Dante's 'Divina Comedia' and the Dictionary? I am Aiyar."

In a trice all was clear. V.V.S. Aiyar, Srinivasacharya knew, had braved vigilant British eyes and had come all the way from London to Pondicherry. Without another word, Srinivasacharya took him upstairs where he was introduced to Bharati. This was the first time they were all meeting one another, though they were familiar to one another as participants in the columns of "India" weekly.

Aiyar told them briefly of his escape from London and of the long journey to Pondicherry. His friends agreed that Pondicherry would be the best place for him to settle just then. For reasons of security, they decided to keep his presence there a secret.

For Aiyar, a new page was starting in his adventurous life.

IX

PONDICHERRY, 1910

PONDICHERRY IN October 1910 when V.V.S. Aiyar reached it was French territory and the capital of French India. The French Indian Settlements consisted of Pondicherry town and some adjoining areas, Karaikal in nearby Tanjore district of Madras, Mahe in Kerala, Yanam in Andhra and Chandernagore in distant Bengal. All of them are coastal places, and were the last remaining footholds of a French empire in India that never took shape.

A historical remnant of earlier centuries which saw British and French rivalries to establish their own supremacy in south India, Pondicherry was noted as the town of Dupleix, able French Governer of the early eighteenth century. The small town was surrounded by British territory except on the east where the Bay of Bengal washed its shore. There were many enclaves around Pondicherry, and one could easily walk across from French to British territory and vice versa. Policing the area was no easy task, and Pondicherry was a natural smugglers' paradise.

A French Governor administered the Settlements with a French India Assembly to advice him. The people of the Settlements elected a Depute to the French National Assembly in Paris. Except during these elections, life in Pondicherry was without major incidents. When

election fever took hold, law and order took a holiday and gangs of ruffians in the pay of different parties or groups had a field day. It was not uncommon for gangs of different paymasters to clash in the streets, fighting pitched battles using brickbats and soda-water bottles. The gangs roamed the streets and even besieged the houses of opponents. French India was proud that its people were citizens of the French Empire unlike the subjects of British India in neighbouring British territory. The poor French India citizen's rights of franchise were much circumscribed by the ruffian element.

But for these election-time abnormalities, life in Pondicherry was easy, calm and cheap. Easy liquor contributed its mite to the overall light-heartedness. Self-contained in food, Pondicherry was dependent on imports by land and sea for consumer goods. Ships on the Calcutta-Colombo route called at Pondicherry, anchoring some miles off in the sea. Passengers embarked and alighted by means of boat; goods were likewise received and sent by them. Quality textiles and silk, as well as foreign liquor were among the chief imports. Groundnut (or as it is called in local parlance "manilla nut") was exported by the ton, chiefly to France.

The railroad to Pondicherry and the postal service there were, curiously enough, in British hands, a stranglehold that the British were unwilling to give up. They used these facilities very much to their advantage, especially in preventing and crushing anti-British activity from the local people or occasional exiles from British India.

In 1910, four years before the outbreak of World War I, the French Government in Paris itself was leaning heavily on the British for safety against an aggressive Germany gnashing its teeth under Kaiser Wilhelm. The administration of the French India Settlements, was,

naturally, dependent on British India for its very safety. But, it must be said to the credit of several French Governors, that they followed a fairly independent policy *vis-a-vis* the British in such matters as British India exiles in Pondicherry.

The credit for making Pondicherry, which all along had the reputation of being an asylum for British Indian debtors, into an asylum for political leaders from the British Provinces goes to the Tamil poet Subramania Bharati. Faced with a prospect of arrest in Madras, Bharati fled to Pondicherry in August 1908 and had been living there ever since. He had continued to carry on his journalistic activities against the British from the safety of Pondicherry; the "India" weekly edited by him in Madras was shifted to Pondicherry, as also a few other sister papers. "Vijaya" a Tamil daily, "Bala Barata", an English monthly, and "Karma Yogi", a Tamil cultural monthly, were all thundering against the British. All of them were conducted by Bharati and his friends, all exiles from British India. "Suryodayam", a local weekly of Pondicherry, also joined the fray—it engaged the services of Nilakanta Brahmachari, a revolutionary from Madras, to edit it.

All these papers were aimed at readers in British India. Subscriptions and even advertisement revenue had to come from British India by post. With the postal services in their hands, the British waylaid and stopped remittances and letters for the papers. As though this was not enough, in March 1910 the entry into British India of "India", "Suryodayam" and "Vijaya" was prohibited, and bundles of these papers were all sent to the Commissioner of Police in Madras and destroyed. Bharati's journalistic activities came to an abrupt halt with this.

Just at this time, the Bengali leader Babu Aurobindo Ghose, who had left politics for yoga, decided to move to Pondicherry to be left in peace to carry on his yogic experiments. Bharati and his publisher Mandayam Srinivasacharya arranged to receive Aurobindo. Aurobindo came in utter secrecy and was lodged in the house of a leading merchant, Kalavai Sankara Chettiar. Some time later, he moved to another house, to immerse himself in yoga sadhana and still later to establish the nucleus of the present-day Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

British Indian patriots living in Pondicherry were commonly called "Swadeshis", after the Swadeshi Movement which they supported. In October 1910, when Aiyar arrived on the scene, the "Swadeshis" in Pondicherry included Subramania Bharati, Mandayam Srinivasacharya, Babu Aurobindo Ghose, Nilakanta Brahmachari, Parali S. Nellayappa Pillai, Harihara Sarma and N. Nagasami. Of these, Aurobindo was the oldest, being 38, Srinivasacharya was 30, Aiyar was 29, Bharati was 28, Nilakanta 21 and the others one or two years younger.

Bharati had been there for over two years, Srinivasacharya a little less, Nilakanta, Nellayappa Pillai, Harihara Sarma and Nagasami had been there for over a year, while Sri Aurobindo had been there six months.

All of them, whether there was any warrant against them or not, were constantly being watched by British agents in Pondicherry. Bharati was a convinced believer in constitutional agitation, Aurobindo had given up politics altogether, Srinivasacharya had strong faith in violent revolution and terrorism, Nilakanta was a believer in organised revolution but not in terrorist assassinations, and Aiyar had arrived in their midst with all the halo of a dedicated revolutionary, who believed in the cult of the bomb and in individual terrorism.

In neighbouring Madras Presidency, politics was in the hands of the moderates of the Congress. The only leader of any eminence who was still at large and veered to the Tilak school of "Extremism" was G. Subramania Iyer, Editor of the Tamil daily "Swadesamitran". He had been arrested in 1908, at the time when action was proposed against Bharati also, and had had to come out after giving an undertaking in view of his failing eyesight. Despite his weakening eyes, he was continuing to edit brilliantly his Tamil daily paper.

Among the English daily papers in Madras, "The Hindu" was being edited by S. Kasturiranga Iyengar, who followed an independent and bold line. "The Patriot" edited by Karunakara Menon was moderate. "The Madras Standard" was in the doldrums. The other papers, "The Madras Times" and "The Madras Mail" were owned and edited by Englishmen.

Some time after his arrival in Pondicherry, V.V.S. Aiyar wrote three letters, to three different parties. One was to the Government of Madras announcing his presence in Pondicherry; the second was to his father, Venkatesa Aiyar, informing him of his safe arrival in Pondicherry; and the third was to his wife Bhagyalakshmi Ammal telling her of his arrival in Pondicherry and asking her to join him. He had decided to stay in Pondicherry for the time being. Actually, he was to make it his home for the next ten years or more.

While Aiyar had been away in England, quite a few developments had taken place in the family circle in India. In 1908 when Aiyar was suspected of complicity in the Curzon-Wyllie assassination, rumour was rife in India

that he would be arrested and sent to either the gallows or the Andamans. Aiyar's mother was taunted by some inconsiderate relatives for having produced such a son. In distress and agony over the fate of her first-born, Aiyar's mother got no consolation but only harsh words. Poor lady, unable to bear the strain, she went berserk and one night went out of the house in Varakaneri to drown herself in a tank nearby.

Aiyar was informed of the demise of his mother. He took it in his stride and continued to devote himself to his patriotic activities. On the banks of the Thames, Aiyar performed the ritual ceremonies that a son owed a dead mother.

Aiyar's father, who had been hopefully looking forward to his son returning a full-fledged barrister, was utterly crestfallen by the letters he received from him. His young wife, with a four-year-old baby girl, was eagerly looking forward to the day when he would return home as a barrister who would keep her in affluent happiness. The four-year-old had also been made to look forward to its "seemai appa" (father in foreign lands) and to all the load of toys and presents he would be bringing her. Aiyar's wife also soon become aware of the great change in her husband. In letters to his wife, he would advise her to be bold "like the Rani of Jhansi". She dutifully prayed to all the gods to restore her husband to her, so that she could stand by him through thick and thin.

When letters arrived that his baby daughter was lisping words, Aiyar wrote back home to the child, "Dear Pattu, when you get up in the morning daily, say Vande Mataram and do your obeisance before the Mother." The child would prattle "Vande Mataram" not only in the morning but all through the day, to the utter annoyance

of the grandfather who knew how the mouthing of this slogan itself was considered an offence by the authorities and how people like V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Sivam, staunch patriots, had been punished for uttering this slogan.

Adding to his fears, police agents started watching his house hoping to gain information about Aiyar's movements and activities. The aged father often bemoaned the fate that had first put ambition in his son's mind and snatched him away from family and fortune. While he was rueing the past like this, the baby girl would repeat within his hearing the words "Vande Mataram". Shaking with fear, Venkatesa Aiyar would say, "Don't say that. The policeman will take you away and put you in jail!" But the child would not be frightened. It would only repeat the words adamantly. "Like father, like child!" would murmur the grandfather.

Fear of the consequences of his son's actions became a chronic obsession with the old man. Suppose they seized the family properties as a punishment to the errant son? Did he not have a share in them? This thought made him sleepless. "Ah, what troubles my vagrant son has brought upon me and the family!" he would often moan.

Aiyar's wife, for no reason of her own, also became the target of cruel comments. Life in the house was a bed of thorns for her. Seeking the help of her cousin Rangoon Pasupati Aiyar, who had settled in Bangalore, she went with her baby to stay with him. Pasupati Aiyar was a man of the world; it was he who had financed Aiyar's trip to London and his study for barristership. He too had been disappointed with Aiyar when news of his patriotic activities reached India. He had, however, hoped that Aiyar would reform once he took

his degree and got enrolled as a barister. He was, therefore, grievously shocked when news came of Aiyar's renunciations of the degree on the plea that he could not take the oath of allegiance to the King. The Madanlal Dhingra incident and its aftermath had worsened the situation. Worldly-wise Pasupati Aiyar preferred to keep Mrs V.V.S. Aiyar's presence in his house a secret. He did not want any pestering by the police.

In this difficult situation, Aiyar's baby girl developed dysentery. They postponed calling in any doctor to avoid making the presence of Aiyar's wife known to the neighbourhood. The child worsened, fell into a delirium, never recovered consciousness, and ultimately died.

Aiyar was informed of the passing away of the baby. But letters from his end only added to the misery of people at home. One letter would say, "I cannot come to India hereafter. Do not hope to see me." A second would say, "I do not know the future." A third would announce, "I have decided to stay in Paris." A fourth would reiterate this and ask Mrs Aiyar to come to Paris to live with him.

Mrs Aiyar was, of course, ready to go to Paris. All she wanted was monetary assistance for her journey. Her benign cousin was once again willing to help, and he was even wanting to visit Paris himself. Pasupati Aiyar made all arrangements for their going. But fate had willed otherwise. Pasupati Aiyar fell down while riding a horse and sprained his ankle. The trip to Paris had to be indefinitely postponed.

All the while Aiyar's letters were urging her to go over to Paris soon. Weeks went by. Pasupati Aiyar had not recovered yet. Now there was a sudden change in the tone of Aiyar's letters. He said he had given up plans of going over to India or living in Paris, and was soon

proceeding to Brazil in South America. He asked his wife to prevail on her father-in-law and cousin to send a band of hardworking south Indian families to go with them to Brazil.

What did this new development portend? Leaving Paris and the civilised world of Europe for an unknown land far far away, for an unknown future? The wife and her relatives were indescribably confused and worried.

To add to their consternation, there was a letter from Madame Cama which cryptically said, "I have sent your husband to a distant country. Do not ask where. Wait and hope."

This was like thunder, a bolt from the blue. The anxious wife asked herself, "What, another mysterious mission? Where to? And would he return safe and sound? When?"

It was while she was killing herself with these endless queries and doubts, and praying to all the gods, that she got one more letter: the one from her husband in Pondicherry! It came like a soothing balm. Her joy knew no bounds. Pasupati Aiyar too was somewhat pleased. After all, it was gratifying to learn that Aiyar was safe and back near home, free from the clutches of the British. Pasupati Aiyar had business dealings with Pondicherry also, and Aiyar's presence there would enable him to see him there. It was, of course, a disappointment to Pasupati Aiyar, no less than to the others, that Aiyar had thrown away the golden opportunity to practise as a barrister and build up a lucrative practice.

Aiyar's father, though relieved that his son was safe from the gallows and the Andamans, was still unreconciled to his nationalist activities to the detriment of his profession; Aiyar's activities also threatened to disrupt peace

at home. The father, Venkatesa Aiyar, came to Pondicherry to meet his son. His visit had two objectives. He wanted to see his son after so many years of separation, and he also wanted to get his son to legally renounce all his rights in the ancestral property in Varakaneri. Aiyar who had so nobly given up a flourishing legal future, with equal nobility gave up legally what ever claims he had in the ancestral house in Varakaneri. This was a remarkable sacrifice, as Aiyar was now in an unknown place, Pondicherry, with no definite source of income. It was typical of Aiyar's generous nature.

Mandayam Srinivasacharya fixed up, for Aiyar, a house in Easwaran Koil Street, in which he himself and Bharati were also living nearby. Aiyar's wife Bhagyalakshmi Ammal came, and Aiyar reunited with his wife after more than three years, started family life all over again. Although Bhagyalakshmi Ammal's dreams of her husband returning home to make the family rich and flourishing had been shattered, she soon acclimatised herself to her husband's devotion to the service of the Motherland. In the years to come she was to prove a heroic wife of a heroic husband.

Easwaran Dharmaraja Koil Street has been described in one of his poems by Bharati as "the street where Fame found an asylum." The reference is to the fact that he himself, Aiyar & Srinivasacharya lived there—all of them exiles who had found asylum in Pondicherry. The three families, though not related by blood, lived like close relatives, sharing one another's misfortunes and standing by one another in times of need.

Not a day passed without their mingling together, exchanging greetings and spending time in small talk. Aiyar and Bharati would spend at least three hours daily in Srinivasacharya's house, discussing politics, playing

cards or a game of chess, or discussing literature and their own writing work on hand. Many days in the week, they would adjourn from there to Sri Aurobindo's place a little further up on the way to the beach, to continue the discussions on the Vedas and the spiritual quest. With their children and their wives accompanying them, on many days they would call at Sri Aurobindo's place and after a brief halt there move on to the sands of the seashore. They bathed in the sea some mornings, Aiyar leading them all deep into the sea. He was an expert swimmer, one undeterred by any situation.

Aiyar was an expert in chess also. He would allow Bharati, who played impetuously, to cut down some of his main pieces, and suddenly turn the tables totally against him. Bharati with childlike innocence would charge Aiyar with "heinous murder" and promise to wreak vengeance in the next game. That however would never happen.

In card play too, Bharati was little better than an amateur. But, Aiyar, who had the gift of applying himself to anything systematically, was a master. He was methodical. Even in the midst of his near-poverty in Pondicherry, it was this methodical approach to problems that saved him from starvation.

X

VANCHI SHOOTS ASHE

SHORTLY AFTER his arrival in Pondicherry, Aiyar became restless doing nothing. "There is a lot of work to do. Not only Madras, but the whole of India, is eagerly looking forward to the Swadeshis in Pondicherry doing something big. It is not proper for us to be doing nothing," he used to murmur. Sri Aurobindo emphasised that it was more important to equip one's self spiritually than to do things outwardly in haste. Aiyar, however, felt that though purity of one's self was important, one should also do some outward work for the country.

Aiyar soon gathered together a band of young men whom he prepared for national work. Mandayam Srinivasacharya says : "Aiyar was an adept in selecting the right man for the right job. Gathering together some young men interested in Swaraj, he tried to give them physical exercises, and a sound knowledge of the the Tamil classics. He fixed up a separate house for their use where he had a friend of his teach them commercial practice. They were also taught boxing and wrestling, sword play and *silambam* (the ancient Tamil art of defence with a quarter staff). Books and newspapers were provided for their reading. There were discussions and debates, and a general attempt to foster the nationalistic spirit. N. Nagasami, who was earlier an administrative assistant in the 'India' weekly, was put in charge.

Nagasami took his food in Aiyar's house. Important festivals and days of national heroes were celebrated at the place. Aiyar tried to create similar institutions in other places through friends known to him. He was, ever since his arrival, constantly doing something. As all these attempts were made in the open, British Indian spies in Pondicherry had no difficulty in knowing full details about them. They were closely watching his activities."

N. Nagasami has also given a detailed account of the work done by Aiyar. The house fixed for the use of the young men was called "Dharmalayam" and was located in 89, Easwaran Dharmaraja Koil St. A monthly journal called "Dharmam", edited by R. Krishnaswami Iyer and printed by M. Narayanan, was also published by Dharmalayam. The paper was unique in that it was distributed free to interested parties. The 8-page journal worked for "Swatantram, Samattvam and Sahodarattvam" (Liberty, Equality and Fraternity). It published articles on such topics as The Reasons for the Decline of India, The Duties of the Four Castes, What Patriots Stand For, The Path to Independence, Human Duty, etc. "The object of the paper," says Nagasami, "was to help the movement for Indian independence, and it was sustained by donations of wellwishers...Pamphlets in English and Tamil were also printed and distributed widely in person and through the post."

Nagasami continues; "Dharmayalam used to receive copies of the papers 'Bande Mataram' published by Madame Cama in Paris, 'Talwar' published by Indian Revolutionaries in Germany, 'The Indian Sociologist' published in Switzerland by Shamji Krishna Varma and the 'Gaelic American' published in New York. These were all papers whose entry into British India had been

prohibited. These were secretly smuggled across the border into British India and posted to a large number of addresses there.

"Five hundred copies of Savarkar's 'Indian War of Independence' (1857) were put in a bullock-cart and in the dead of night transported across the border to Kancheepuram from where they were distributed all over India. The British C.I.D.'s were willing to give one hundred rupees for a single copy of the book !

"Dharmalayam strongly advocated the importance of physical exercise. Young men would gather at dawn and learn different types of physical exercises. On Sundays and Thursdays, they would go to the sea for a swim. On some evenings, they would do running exercises on the sands of Pondicherry beach."

It had all the makings of a recruiting ground for a revolutionary cell. Probably Aiyar was hoping to organise one. But the atmosphere in Pondicherry was far different from that of London. Moreover, in Pondicherry, unfortunately, two leaders who believed in revolution disagreed on the immediate approach to it. Nilakanta Brahmachari, who was Editor of the Tamil weekly "Suryodayam" till it was closed down, had strong "ideological differences" with Aiyar. According to Nilakanta, "Aiyar was a believer in terrorism, the assassination of individual Europeans and their helpers. When he came from Europe, he felt that the conditions in India were such that there could be no organised revolution. He did not know, and did not unfortunately believe, that a big revolutionary movement was being organised all over India. The Maharaja of Baroda and Sri Aurobindo were in touch with the German Government which had been for nearly ten years preparing for a big war to start in 1914. The German Foreign Office

had contacted Baroda and promised to provide large-scale arms for starting a rebellion all over India. Baroda was organising this in secret. Other princes were also in it. I was organising the Poligars in South India for this.

"The terrorists in India had no all-India plan. They were isolated, working separately here and there. They were trigger-happy young men. Terrorism did not take real roots in India. It was cultivated by Indians living abroad. Aiyar was influenced by the Russian anarchist school of bomb-throwers. When he came to India, he did not know what had been done in India. Aiyar did not believe it when I told him what had been done by Baroda, and myself in the South. He pooh-poohed it. We had thus strong ideological differences and one day fell out in violent argument."

While things were going on in this fashion in Pondicherry, Parali S. Nellayappa Pillai, a friend of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai who was in Coimbatore Jail, returned after a visit to him with harrowing tales of Chidambaram Pillai's sufferings in jail. Chidambaram Pillai was reported to have said in exasperation, "All this is the work of Sub-Collector Ashe. Is there no end to this man's orgy ?"

Ashe was the Sub-Collector of Tuticorin who harassed Chidambaram Pillai and got him behind bars in 1908. The arrest of Chidambaram Pillai and his colleague Subramania Sivam resulted in the Tirunelveli riots. Wynch, the Collector, and Ashe, the Sub-Collector, behaved in a barbarous manner to suppress the riots. Ashe became Collector of the district later on; with his strong influence with the Madras Government, Ashe was making jail life difficult for Chidambaram Pillai with a view to breaking his morale.

Chidambaram Pillai's remarks to Nellayappan were

taken as an incitement to Chidambaram Pillai's associates outside to do away with Ashe. They sounded some Marava chieftains in Tirunelveli district; but they refused, since they were guided by Nilakanta Brahmachari and he was against it. When Aiyar heard of this, he took it into his head to do something in the matter.

Just then, early in January 1911, Vanchi Iyer, a clerk in the Travancore State Forest Department and a member of Nilakanta Brahmachari's revolutionary group, came on a visit to Pondicherry to meet Nilakanta. As fate would have it, Nilakanta was out of station and Vanchi had to cool his heels for a week waiting for his return. During this week of compulsory wait, Vanchi met Aiyar and other leaders in Pondicherry. Aiyar saw the young man's potential and immediately converted him to his camp and indoctrinated him to carry out the shooting of Ashe. Vanchi agreed to do away with Ashe, went back to his place and then returned all ready for training. Aiyar's assistant Nagasami says :

"Dharmalayam gave a warm welcome to Vanchi. He stayed for a month. During this month, Aiyar came regularly and gave Vanchi private instruction. Each day, at 4 a.m., Vanchi would be taken to Garadikuppam Odai and given practice in shooting straight. Meanwhile, the Browning pistol sent by Madame Cama arrived. A Tamil pamphlet titled 'The Duty of Aryans' was also ready...At the closing week of May 1911, one night Vanchi was escorted by myself and one Kannu Pillai out of Dharmalayam, with pistol and pamphlets. We went on foot to Villianur and then to Bahour. There we crossed the river and moved to Tiruppappuliyur where we put Vanchi on a train going South."

On July 17, 1911, Vanchi struck. The "Ashe Murder" was headline news all over India.

Robert William D'Estecourt Ashe, Collector of Tirunelveli, was travelling from Tirunelveli to the Kodaikanal hill-station in neighbouring Madurai district. Ashe had to change trains at Maniyachi Junction. Vanchi also travelled from Tirunelveli by the same train, keeping a close watch on Ashe.

As soon as the train arrived in Maniyachi, Ashe and his wife got down from the first-class compartment and took their seats in the train for Kodaikanal, which was waiting at another platform. Ashe was reading something, while his wife was looking out at the platform. A mail train arrived at an adjacent platform and passengers rushed hither and thither. A shot rang out and Ashe was hit by a bullet on the left side of the chest below the collar bone. The assailant was a young man. A few more shots rang out and Ashe fell down in the carriage, bleeding profusely. He was dead in a few minutes

Vanchi Aiyar, the assailant, when he was convinced Ashe was dead, started to speed away from the place. Ashe's orderly caught hold of him, but Vanchi escaped, pointing his revolver at him. He walked down the platform, smoking revolver in hand, threatening to shoot down anyone who dared to approach him. At the end of the platform, Vanchi entered a lavatory and shot himself dead in the mouth.

The police dared not enter the lavatory for quite some time. When at last they did, Vanchi was lying dead on the ground, his right hand still clutching the revolver.

According to police records quoted by the Rowlatt Report on terrorist activities in India, a statement in Tamil was found on Vanchi's person saying that every Indian was trying to drive out the Englishman and restore Swarajya. Rama, Krishna, Guru Gobind and Guru Arjun, ruled over the land protecting all religions, but now the English

were preparing to crown in India a *mleccha* who ate the flesh of cows. Three thousand men had taken a vow to kill George V as soon as he landed in India for his coronation, and to make their intention known, he, Vanchi, "the least of the company" had done that deed that day.

In searches of the houses of Vanchi's brother-in-law Shankarakrishnan and others, two pamphlets were discovered, one titled "A Word of Advice to Aryans", which urged killing the *feringhi* wherever possible. The other was called "The Oath of Admission into the Abhinava Bharat Society". According to the police, ten copies of each of these pamphlets had been sent by a member of the staff of "Dharmam" paper of Pondicherry.

Nilakanta Brahmachari, the revolutionist strongly suspected by the police of having conspired to carry out the assassination of Ashe, was, as we have come to know, decidedly against the deed. When his henchman Vanchi was decoyed by Aiyar to carry out the deed, Nilakanta thought it best to keep himself furthest from the scene. Weeks before the event, he went to north India, and was staying in Kashi (Banaras) with a friend when he read newspaper reports of the killing. The news reports also said that the police had rounded up several of Nilakanta's close followers including his right-hand man Shankarakrishnan. Their houses had also been searched and reportedly some incriminating letters found. The police were also said to be on the lookout for Nilakanta.

Nilakanta went to Calcutta to consult seniors in the field, and as advised, he surrendered to the police in Calcutta. He was innocent of conspiracy to kill Ashe; of course, he was guilty of trying to foment rebellion against the Government.

The Madras police peculiarly did not implicate V. V. S. Aiyar at all in the Ashe murder. Either for lack of information or lack of evidence, his part in the conspiracy was not taken note of. On the other hand, Nilakanta Brahmachari, who had no hand at all in the crime, was made First Accused in the Ashe Murder Case. The charges against him were conspiracy to kill Ashe and attempt to overthrow the King's Government. In the case, after a protracted trial, the judges dismissed the charge of conspiracy as unproved and sentenced Nilakanta to seven years' rigorous imprisonment, and the others to lesser sentences. Aiyar, the main instigator, went scot-free; he was safe in Pondicherry, and had no warrant in the case. The old British warrant (if it was still valid) was as good as forgotten.

But this did not mean that Aiyar had become a good boy in the eyes of the British Indian police. He had enough troubles ahead, as we shall soon see.

The Ashe murder came as a rude shock to the British authorities who had always imagined that the Madras Presidency was free from violent activities. Although they could not prove the involvement of the Pondicherry patriots in the Ashe murder, they felt sure that Pondicherry must be watched day and night. With so many leaders living there in exile, the chances of their hatching some scheme or other to create trouble for the British were not negligible. With war clouds gathering in Europe, a stringent watch was necessary. This was the start of an era of harassment for Bharati, Aiyar, Srinivasacharya and to some extent even Sri Aurobindo. A large contingent of the Madras police camped along the borders of Pondicherry, and innumerable agents in plain clothes infiltrated into Pondicherry to shadow the patriots. Several plots were hatched to put them into

loggerheads with the French Indian authorities. That the patriots survived all the machinations against them was nothing short of a miracle.

Va. Ra. (V. Ramaswami Iyengar), the eminent Tamil writer and biographer of Bharati, who was living in Pondicherry at this time, has given a vivid account of efforts of the Madras police to involve the "Swadeshis" of Pondicherry in trouble. Va. Ra. says : "It must be said the Madras Police literally 'invaded' Pondicherry. There were hundreds of them in the town. Bharati's house, Aiyar's house, Aurobindo's house—they could be seen seated in bunches outside. It was all like a puppet show. If the patriots were inside their houses, these policemen would squat outside neighbouring houses. If they went out, they followed at a distance. What started as a nuisance to the patriots, soon developed as a nuisance to their friends also...

"The British Indian Police took on rent a bungalow in Pondicherry. A Deputy Superintendent, by name Abdul Kareem, was in charge of the operations. Under him there were two able Police Inspectors, Guruvappa Naidu and Rangaswami Iyengar. These worked with unimaginable ardour to 'surround and crush' the patriots. Besides these officers, there were a good number of Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors, Head Constables and Constables. The total number would not have been less than two hundred....

"When the patriots went out of their houses, some of the British Indian police would follow them and the rest would distribute themselves in the town, to mix with the people of the town, each according to his status. The ordinary constable would mix with rickshaw pullers and pan shop owners and urge them not to have any business with the Indian leaders. The Sub-Inspectors would

meet people of affluence and issue discreet warnings against helping the patriots... Guruvappa Naidu and Rangaswami Iyengar would often visit Bharati. They thought they could cleverly talk Bharati into revealing secrets of their activities. They would try to worm out what secret ties the Pondicherry Swadeshis had with Vanchi, the assassin of Ashe...There was strong rumour that they were receiving arms from France and other countries and piling them up in Pondicherry...It was because of these doubts that the British police in Pondicherry visited the houses of Bharati, Aiyar and others in various guises as a gem merchant, as an advocate, as an ardent patriot from Tamil Nadu, as a sannyasi, and as a lover of Tamil classics—to see what information they could get.

"The wild rumours they set afloat was laughable. Someone would come running with perspiration running down his cheek to gasp the information that the British Indian police had made all arrangements to abduct the Indian patriots and carry them into British India. Another would say he had authentic information that the French Governor had ordered the Indian patriots to leave within twenty four hours and that a French India policeman was coming to serve the order...

"There was a leader of the fisherfolk community called Nandagopal Chetty. He was doing some stevedoring and dealing in groundnut. He was reputed to have a large number of henchmen...It would be said that this Nandagopal had come to an understanding with the British Indian Police to seize the Indian patriots in Pondicherry and hand them over in the next two or three days. The joke was that this very Nandagopal would have met Bharati or Srinivasacharya on a purely friendly visit and this would have been twisted by the

agents as stated above."

Mandayam Srinivasacharya adds: "All letters and money orders addressed to the Indian patriots were waylaid and withheld by the post office. Even their relatives and friends from British India were harassed; they were arrested the moment they returned to British India. As though this was not enough, the Madras Police got printed some handbills and had them widely distributed in Pondicherry and surroundings. The names of the Indian patriots were listed in the handbills and a reward of a thousand rupees per head was offered for their capture. Such police announcements were common regarding criminals involved in dacoity and murder who had evaded arrest. That such a handbill announcement should be made about us who were living an open life and had not gone into any hiding was most unusual."

Among the "Swadeshi" leaders in Pondicherry, Aiyar was the most sought-after prize for the British Indian police. He was the most daring as well as the most careful among the "Swadeshis". He always carried a revolver on his person and slept with it in the night. Whenever he went out, he would tell his wife where he was going and when he would return and how many taps he would give on the door. He also had the habit of spitting characteristically loudly which was an indication to his wife of his arrival.

Many were Aiyar's hair-raising experiences.

One day Aiyar was returning from an evening walk on the beach. When he was returning, a gang of spies in the pay of the British barred his way hoping to abduct him in a horse-cart and carrying him into British Indian territory. Aiyar saw the ruffians from a distance and suddenly turned into a by-lane. He made his way fast to the

famous Manakula Vinayakar temple and there quietly slipped behind the Ganesha idol. He stayed there the whole night when the temple was locked up and slipped out in the morning reaching home in safety. Of course, his wife spent an anxious night not knowing what had happened to him.

Another day, when Aiyar was visiting a friend in his house, a party of spies surrounded the house, hoping to catch him when he came out. But as they were waiting, a loud wail rose inside the house and arrangements were made for removing a dead body. Shortly after, a "dead body" with face covered by white cloth was taken out on a bier. It reached the cremation ground. The four persons who had carried it looked round to see if they had been followed by the spies. Not seeing any, the "dead body" was untied and Aiyar stood up. He reached his house escorted by his friends.

Aiyar himself has narrated a more thrilling incident that took place sometime later. It was the time of local elections. Pondicherry was in turmoil, as usual on such occasions. It was eight in the night. Aiyar was having a meal at home. A crowd gathered outside his house and there was heavy knocking on the front door. Drunken voices outside threatened Aiyar and asked him to come out of the house. Aiyar's new-born baby daughter Subhadra was sleeping in a swing. Aiyar hurriedly rose from his meal. He and his wife rolled up a heavy stone mortar against the front door. Bhagyalakshmi Ammal, Aiyar's wife, boldly went near the front door and saw through a hole in it. Outside, a number of known ruffians had gathered. They reeked of alcohol. As instructed by Aiyar, she loudly told the persons outside that Aiyar was taking his meals and would come out soon. The gang waited in an anticipatory mood, imagining

their prey was in their net. Inside the house, Aiyar went to the back of the place, climbed the back wall and walking along, got down into the backyard of the house after the next. Here we shall take Aiyar's own narration :

"In that house there was a couple, a teacher and his wife. They were alone. I rapped on the back door softly. The lady of the house opened the door and was on the point of giving a shout seeing me. I at once said in a pleading voice, 'Madam, please do not shout. There are some twenty to twenty five ruffians in front of my house. Their intentions are unruly. All I want you to do is to give asylum to my wife and our young baby.' The lady went in and brought her husband. They agreed to wait there. I returned to my house. The scamps outside my house were banging on the front door without respite. The baby was crying. Bhagyam was agitated. I asked her to sooth the baby. We went to the back of our house, I climbed the back wall and taking the baby carried her to the teacher's house. The lady there took the child inside. I returned to my house, helped my wife who was very weak to climb the back wall, and escorted her to the teacher's house. After she got down, they took her in and bolted their back door. Leaving them safe like this, I returned to my house, I removed my personal box containing valuable books and records and a picture of Madame Cama, carrying it to the teacher's house for safety. Then I came back, and taking my revolver in my hand, went to the open terrace of the house. From there I looked down on the drunken mob gathered before my house. I held my hand high and sent three shots in the air. When the mob heard the shots, they got scared and ran helter skelter. That was the end of trouble that day."

The next morning Aiyar and Srinivasacharya presented a petition before the French Indian Governor, M. Duprat. They told him that only the paid agents of the British Indian police were responsible for such incidents. The whole thing began with the announcements offering rewards for the capture of Indian patriots who were living a life of open activity. The Governor said he had already prevented the further circulation of the handbill announcing the rewards, but added it might take him some time to get rid of the British agents in Pondicherry altogether. However, in order to extend protection to them, the Governor promised to place two French Indian policemen in each of their houses for guard duty. This he did and for some time Aiyar and the others had a peaceful life.

All the same, for some weeks, Aiyar lived with Srinivasacharya, in his house, as it was felt that Aiyar should not live alone. In the weeks he was with Srinivasacharya, Aiyar took his aid to brush up his facility in French. Srinivasacharya had been a Professor of French and the two took up for study a volume of letters by Napoleon on military matters. Soon enough, Aiyar was able to follow the book by himself. After that, he went on to read other books in French on military science.

XI

A JAR IN THE WELL

WHEN ALL their crude efforts to physically abduct Aiyar and other "Swadeshi" leaders in Pondicherry failed miserably, the British Indian police hatched new plots to oust them. The use of ruffian gangs to threaten and waylay the "Swadeshis" had only created public sympathy in their favour. Therefore the British Indian police tried higher official sources to gain their ends.

High officials of the British Indian police sought frequent interviews with the French Indian Governor and tried to poison his mind with false tales involving the "Swadeshi" leaders. One of their efforts was to paint the leaders as Anarchists, those who do not believe in any form of Government and are therefore disliked by all Governments. However, the French Governor was just enough to demand proof of this, and since the British Indian police were unable to produce any, he refused to ban the "Swadeshis".

The resourceful policemen then tried another ruse. Since all the "Swadeshis" were foreigners in French India, the policemen inspired the passing of a law which would refuse living rights to such foreigners. By repeated efforts, they persuaded the French Governor to agree to the introduction of a Bill to this effect in the French Indian Assembly.

At the time this took place, the position of French India

was unenviable. In Europe, Germany, the traditional enemy of France, was arming itself for a full-scale war, and was intent on reducing France's prestige everywhere. Kaiser Wilhelm, the German Emperor, had sent his warships into Agadir harbour in French Morocco and created a big scene. France was forced to seek Britain's close friendship to offset the German threat. Because of this, the French Foreign Office was naturally sympathetic to moves that would please the British. It was no wonder that the French Governor in Pondicherry gave his assent to the Bill.

But members of the French Indian Assembly were unwilling totally to let down the Indian patriots living in Pondicherry, who would be the persons immediately affected.

Thanks to successful lobbying by the "Swadeshi" leaders and their friends, a clause was added to the Bill to the effect that those who were resident in French India a full year before the passage of the new measure could continue to reside in Pondicherry, provided they were able to get the signatures of five Honorary Magistrates and register themselves.

The British Indian police were sure that the "Swadeshis" would never be able to get the five requisite signatures, and therefore did not prevent the inclusion of the clause in the Bill. The Etrangers Bill (The Strangers Bill) was passed and became law.

Now that the Bill was law, it was necessary that the Indian patriots should register themselves within a few days by obtaining the signatures of five Honorary Magistrates. The British Indian police officials had already contacted all the local Honorary Magistrates through third parties and were sure that none of the Magistrates would sign.

The "Swadeshi" leaders met at Sri Aurobindo's house. They discussed the situation threadbare. But they could not decide how they could get over the hurdle. The meeting dispersed inconclusively. Little did they know that help was round the corner, and that all their difficulties would have been surmounted by the next evening!

Va. Ra. recounts how this miracle happened. Va. Ra. writes : "As Bharati was going home from the meeting, he asked me to see him at his house at eight the next morning.

"The next day, when I presented myself at the appointed hour, Bharati said, 'Shall we go ?' The pessimism of the previous evening had vanished.

" 'Whereto ?' I asked.

" 'Don't ask any question. Simply come along', he said.

"I was annoyed, even angry at this brusque reply. But I went along.

"We both went to Kalavai Sankara Chettiar's house. Chettiar was in the main hall of the house, sitting on the *oonjal* (swing). Seeing Bharati he respectfully got up and greeted him.

"Bharati returned the greeting and straightaway said, 'Chettiar, with people like you in Pondicherry, is it still necessary for us all to leave the town ? I suppose you know the new legislation that has been passed into law?' Sankara Chettiar was out of town at the time of the passage of the Etrangers Bill. He did not know anything about it.

"Bharati explained its details and how it affected the Indian patriots living in Pondicherry. He asked Chettiar's advice on what to do.

"Sankara Chettiar smiled and said, 'This is no big thing. I am myself an Honorary Magistrate. I shall get you

the signatures of the other four also.'

" 'Thank you,' said Bharati. 'But it has to be done before this evening. Is it possible ?'

" 'This evening ? I shall get the signatures within the next two hours!' said Sankara Chettiar. 'Only get the papers ready and give them to me. I shall get the attestations'

"The forms for Sri Aurobindo, Aiyar, Bharati, Srinivasacharya, Va. Ra., and the others, were made ready at once and given to Sankara Chettiar. He got the five signatures by Honorary Magistrates and by 3 p.m. that day we had presented the forms and registered ourselves as residents."

Thus one more obstacle to Aiyar and the others living in Pondicherry was got over. Aiyar particularly heaved a sigh of relief.

But this was not the end of their troubles. Though cheated for the time being, the British Indian police made further attempts to dislodge the Indian patriots. Their attempt at evicting them by legislative means having failed, the police tried to convince the French authorities that the "Swadeshis" were dangerous conspirators who were working against the French also. If the French were made to believe this, the "Swadeshis" could either be put into prison or thrown out of Pondicherry.

In 1910, when Bharati's "India" weekly was being published, the British Indian police had engaged a Pondicherry youngster by name Mayuresan to make all kinds of false reports about the Indian patriots. He was paid amply for this service. But as thieves too fall out, Mayuresan fell out with the British Indian police. He wrote a long letter to the "India" weekly telling how he had been used as a tool by the British Indian police who had promised him large sums of money but had failed to

make good the payment. The letter was published in the paper.

Now, after three years, the British Indian police got Mayuresan and his father present a petition to the French authorities charging the Indian leaders in Pondicherry with conspiracy to offer white men's heads as sacrificial offerings to Goddess Kali. They were reported to be doing pooja to Kali with swords and daggers for this purpose. If a surprise raid was made at their houses, it was said, further proof could be had, particularly in the well in Aiyar's house. Aiyar and the others were unaware of the petition.

One morning at this time, the maid servant in Aiyar's house went to the well to draw water. She then noticed a jar floating in the well. Afraid it was some attempt at black magic, the lady raised a hue and cry. Aiyar tried to take the jar out of the well with the help of a wicker basket let down into the well. Though the jar got into the basket, they could not lift it up. The jar had a length of rope attached, and this was tied to a stone lying at the bottom. A boy was sent into the well, and he cut the rope and brought the jar out. It was clear that someone had anchored the jar to a stone and thrown the jar and stone into the well, hoping the jar would also remain submerged.

Aiyar took the jar to Srinivasacharya. They called on Bharati, and the three of them went with the jar, still unopened, to the Governor. There they showed the jar and narrated the circumstances of its discovery. The jar was sealed tight. The Governor had the seal broken and the jar opened. There were some printed papers and a rubber stamp inside. A picture of Goddess Kali with many severed heads in her hand was inside. The enrolment forms of some revolutionary association were also

there. The forms said that Pandit Shamji Krishna Varma was the head of the association and that the local Secretary was Srinivasacharya. There was a rubber stamp purporting to be the signature of Srinivasacharya. An application form for membership from Nilakanta Brahmachari and an enrolment form were also inside the jar.

The Governor had possibly received and seen the petition of Mayuresan beforehand. He was reserved in his talk with the Indian patriots. He said they might report the matter to the French Indian police. Taking leave of the Governor, they told him that all this mischief was the result of permitting the British Indian police and their agents to behave with impunity in Pondicherry. This too was their handiwork only.

The matter was reported by Aiyar to the French Indian police, as desired by the Governor. All the three of them, Aiyar, Bharati and Srinivasacharya. were asked to be present at the Tribunal, the Magistrate's Court, the next morning.

Next morning, the Magistrate waved a sheet of paper before them and said, "We have received a petition that you are all conspiring to do something terrible. What do you say to that?"

Aiyar and the others at that time did not know who had submitted the petition. They flatly denied all accusations of conspiracy and said that such stories must have been cooked up by agents in the pay of the British Indian police. These things would happen as long as they were permitted to be active in and around Pondicherry.

"This is not a petition by a paid agent, but by a French citizen," the Magistrate said. "In fact, he is here in the Court now." He pointed to Mayuresan and his father. This brought a burst of laughter from Aiyar and the

others. Srinivasacharya said at once, "I know full well this man is a paid agent of the British police. He has been that for a long time. When I was publishing the 'India' weekly, he used to receive money from them and concoct false stories about us. When they refused to pay him to his greedy satisfaction, he turned round on them and exposed their efforts by writing a letter to us. This letter was published in 'India' at that time."

The Magistrate asked Mayuresan if this was true. He blandly asserted that he had never written anything to 'India' and that it was possible that they had published something in his name without his knowing.

Srinivasacharya laughed and said he would produce Mayuresan's letter in his own handwriting in the afternoon. The Court adjourned. But the French Indian police were instructed to make an immediate and thorough search of the houses of all the Indian patriots. The police discovered nothing incriminating.

That afternoon Aiyar and the others presented themselves at the Court. But Mayuresan and his father had made themselves scarce. Probably they were afraid of the exposure, as they could be arrested for making false charges.

Mayuresan, however, did not stop at that. He sent a petition to the Governor stating that the enquiring Magistrate of the Tribunal had threatened him in collusion with the Indian leaders, and that he (Mayuresan) and his father had therefore, fearing arrest, removed themselves to Cuddalore in British India.

The Governor dismissed Mayuresan's petition after due enquiry.

The Indian patriots in Pondicherry were all declared innocent. The much-expected incident of the jar in the

well proved a damp squib to the British Indian police.

Mayuresan, discovering the trend of events against him, ran away to Singapore. He never returned to Pondicherry for a long time.

XII

EXILE TO ALGIERS?

HAVING FAILED in their attempt to remove bodily the Indian patriots in Pondicherry and not having succeeded in getting them thrown out by legislative action, the British Indian authorities took up the matter at a higher level. With a persistence worthy of better causes, they desired to plug the "loop-hole" of Pondicherry, a loop-hole which permitted patriotic Indian leaders to act with impunity against the British. There was flurried correspondence between Delhi and London, and mention by British cabinet ministers in England of exchange of some places in British West Indies for French possessions in India.

It looked as though the deal would go through; the French Government leaders were agreeable to a great extent.

This was a dangerous portent for the Indian patriots in Pondicherry. A real sword of Damocles hung over their heads.

Aurobindo Ghose wrote to friends in Paris, La Port and Paul Bluesson. At Bharati's instance, his friend and influential businessman Ponnu Murugesam Pillai wrote to his own friends in Paris. A change in the French cabinet seemed imminent, and if the matter could be stalled for the time being, it might help to throw it out altogether. The French friends were assured that

the people of French India wanted to remain only with France and had no love for being transferred to Britain.

There was a meeting in Pondicherry and a resolution was passed protesting against the idea of exchange. The French friends in Paris strained themselves on behalf of the people of Pondicherry. Just at the crucial moment, luckily, the French cabinet fell.

The new French Prime Minister, M. Poincare, spoke in ringing tones about the exchange issue. "I shall not agree," he told the French Chamber of Deputies, "to the exchange of any territory where the French flag flies for any other territory. Land where French blood has been shed is sacred soil for France. Frenchmen would never agree to the giving up of any French territory, least of all Pondicherry, where the statue of Dupleix stands."

This speech came as a balm to the Indian patriots and the people of Pondicherry.

But the British Indian authorities, spurred by lurid tales spun out by their police subordinates on the Pondicherry border, continued to fear Indian patriots in French India. In less than a year, the Great War (World War I) broke out and British worries were increased by German battleships. In the Bay of Bengal, the German battleship 'Emden' struck terror by throwing the sea-lanes into disarray and by firing a few shots into Madras city. Two huge kerosene-oil tanks in Royapuram were hit and burst into flames, burning for days together. People evacuated parts of the city in a hurry.

The British Indian authorities were informed by their spies that the Indian nationalists in Pondicherry were in communication with the 'Emden'. Aiyar was known to have scanned the sea with a telescope, looking at the German flotilla when 'Emden' had called. This was sheer curiosity

and had no deeper motive. The British at once tried to get the French Indian Government to banish the Indian patriots to distant Africa. Fortunately, this did not succeed and the Indian leaders continued to remain in Pondicherry. This threat of distant exile, however, benefited literature, since Aiyar, in order to leave some substantial literary work in his memory in case he was exiled, translated in white heat the whole of the classic Tamil didactic work "Kural" by Tiruvalluvar.

The story is best told in Aiyar's own words. In the Preface to the Second Edition of his "Maxims of Tiruvalluvar", he says : "When, soon after the Great War broke out, the Emden was scouring the Bay of Bengal, some members of the secret police force stationed by the British Indian Government at Pondicherry to watch the movements of the Indian refugees thought it a golden opportunity to rise in the service by connecting the latter with the activities of the Emden. It is said that as a result of their plot, the Madras Government desired the then Governor of Pondicherry to banish the Indian political refugees to Africa. Anyway, the French police brought several charges against these refugees among whom was Shriman Aiyar. These cases, however, failed ignominously. In spite of that, the then Governor of Pondicherry wished to deport them to Algeria. He however, wanted that it should not appear that he forced them to leave Pondicherry. He, therefore sent messengers to them who threatened them unofficially with all sorts of dire consequences if they did not voluntarily leave for Algiers. The negotiation lasted for about four or five months. As soon as the negotiation started, Shriman Aiyar thought that the French Government might any day force him out of Pondicherry, and wanted

to leave something behind him which might keep his memory green among his countrymen even though his body should be removed by force out of the Tamil land which he loved so dearly.

"He therefore set about to think as to what would be the best thing for him to do under these circumstances, taking into consideration the very short and precarious period of time at his disposal. It did not take him long to decide that if he could translate into English the shortest and at the same time the most perfect of the ancient Tamil classics, he could claim a small corner in the memory of his countrymen. He therefore set to work at it at top speed.

"It was about the lst of November, 1914 that he put pen on paper. Day after day he pounded away at the translation, every evening thinking that the next morning he might receive a peremptory order to leave Pondicherry. This sword of Damocles ever hanging above his head only made him determine to work at white heat, so that in case he had to leave India he might leave as large a number as possible of the maxims worthily translated. He went on with his translation with so much ardour that even while his house was being searched by the French police for discovering if he had concealed in his house a fugitive from justice, he put his hand to the translation the moment the police left his study to search the other parts of his house. He was a happy man when on the lst of March 1915 the last lines of the preface were fair-copied and the whole book was ready for the press."

"Kural", the eminent poetical work of 1330 couplets, by poet Tiruvalluvar of the lst century A. D., is now better known to the rest of the world than at Aiyar's time. All the same, Aiyar's scholarly preface to his

translation is worth quoting at some length.

"Very few in the world outside of the Tamil country have heard the name of the poet whose work is presented here in a new English garb," wrote Aiyar. "And yet he is one of those seers whose message is intended not merely for their own age or country but for all time and for all mankind...Tiruvalluvar has given to the world a work to which, in perfection of form, profundity of thought, nobleness of sentiment, and earnestness of moral purpose, very few books outside the grand scriptures of humanity can at all be compared. Indeed his work is eulogised by the Tamil people as the Tamil Veda, the Universal Veda, the later Veda, the Divine Veda, etc. etc. It is a great pity that such a treasure should have been confined for so many ages to one single people even in Hindustan."

After mentioning that "Kural" has been translated in full or in parts into many European languages (Latin, German, English—many translations, French—at least three translations), Aiyar says that after seeing all available translations, he had for long cherished a desire to make an independent translation in English of the whole book. In undertaking this translation, it was his object "not only to spread a knowledge of Tiruvalluvar's grand work as widely as possible in the world, but also to induce my own countrymen speaking languages other than Tamil to retranslate it into their different vernaculars, so that the words of a great moral teacher who intended his message for all the world and for all time may not fail at least now to reach the ears of the poorest of the poor and the simplest of the simple of his own countrymen, and to sow in their hearts the seeds of a noble, dignified, virtuous and manly life."

"Kural" is divided into three parts, the first devoted

to Righteousness, the second to Wealth, and the third to Love. It does not treat of the fourth commonly accepted objective of life, namely, Heavenly Bliss. The teachings of "Kural", if followed closely, automatically lead one to self-realisation, the highest happiness man can enjoy here or hereafter.

Dealing with the contents of the work, Aiyar says, "In Part I, under the title of Righteousness, our author treats of the life of the householder and of the life of the ascetic...What is the grand feature of the first part is its healthy outlook on life. 'The chiefest blessing,' declares our author, 'is an honourable home, and its crowning glory its worthy offspring.' How charming is his love for children! 'The touch of our children is the delight of the body.' 'It is only they who have not listened to the prattle of their little ones that are attracted by the guitar and the flute!' The poet insists greatly on the love of mankind and the honouring of guests as among the chief virtues of man...the first section ends... with a chapter on Glory, for 'They alone live who live without blemish; and they alone die who lived without glory.' It will thus be seen that it is a cheerful, smiling, benignant humanity that Tiruvalluvar wants to create in his country and the world."

Of the second part of the book, dealing with "Wealth", Aiyar says : "The fact that this part is about twice the size of the first and thrice the size of the third shows what importance the sage gives to politics and wealth in his scheme of life . As in the first part the poet shows himself as a moral teacher of the very highest order, so in this part he appears as a consummate statesman and thorough man of the world..." This part deals with the acquisition of wealth, the duties of a prince and that of a minister.

The third part titled "Love", deals with love in all its aspects. "The most ardent admirers of 'Locksley Hall' will have to admit that the Tamil poet is easily the superior of Tennyson in analysing the infinite number of moods that chase each other in the agitated minds of lovers," Aiyar observes.

Summing up the greatness of "Kural", Aiyar observes, "Whether he speaks of moral duties or State policy, of the principles of action to be followed in order to succeed in life, or the varying emotions in the trembling hearts of lovers, everywhere Tiruvalluvar has sounded the depths of human thought. The prophets of the world have not emphasised the greatness and power of the moral law with greater insistence or force; Bhishma or Kautilya, Kamandaka or Ram Das, Vishnu Sharman or Machiavelli or Confucius have no more subtle counsel to give on the conduct of the State; 'Poor Richard' has no wiser say for raising up of clever business-men; and Kalidasa or Shakespeare have no deeper knowledge of the lovers' heart and its varied moods than this pariah weaver of Mylapore! Such is the universality of mind of this great seer who was born in the Tamil country but who belongs to all mankind..."

Having survived the threat of exile to Algiers, Aiyar devoted himself more consistently to literary work, partly as a national service and partly as a means of livelihood. As had been noted earlier, the postal authorities in Pondicherry, who were servants of the Government of India, withheld letters and money-orders to the "Swadeshis" coming from outside. So the leaders had to adopt ruses of their own to get money from relatives and sympathisers in British India without detection by the Pondicherry postal authorities. Sometimes currency notes were received secreted in the cardboard wrappers

of books. Sometimes rupee coins were received hidden in other things. Arumugam Chettiar, a leading businessman of Pondicherry who was a close friend of Bharati, Aiyar and Srinivasacharya, told the author of this biography that at the instance of Aiyar and the others, he used to order *ghee* in bulk in tins from British India. Each time rupee coins were smuggled into French India in the ghee in these tins.

Publication of their books was an important source of income for Aiyar and Bharati. Bharati had his poetical work "Kannan Paattu" published in Madras by a friend; Aiyar got his translation of "Kural", which he titled "Maxims of Tiruvalluvar", printed in Pondicherry. He started a publication outfit by name Kamba Nilayam for the publication and sale of his books. Besides the Kural translation, Kamba Nilayam published seven books in Tamil. After a while, Srinivasacharya was taken in as a partner and books by him were also published by the concern. Of the Tamil books, the first was a selection from the "Bala Kanda" of Kamban's epic "Ramayana". This "Bala Kandam" showed Aiyar as an able literary critic, who easily brought to the average reader the beauties of Kamban's poems. The next was a book of modern short stories—the first in the Tamil language—called "Mangayarkkarasiyin Kaathal mudaliya kathaikal". Aiyar had thus become not only the father of modern literary criticism but also the father of the modern short story in Tamil. In the preface to to this volume, Aiyar stated that the objective he had in mind in bringing this new genre to Tamil literature was to foster the long-forgotten heroism of the Tamil people. The first two stories, the title story and another, were (said Aiyar) "written in the pattern of the Gaelic (Irish) poet of eminence, Ossian." The stories in the volume covered

many emotions : heroism, mad love, pathetic separation, etc. "Anarkali", a story from history, "Laila Majnun", a story from the Persian poet Nizami, and "Ethiroliyaal" (Echo) from Greek mythology were three stories from world sources embellished by Aiyar's narration.

Kamba Nilayam's book "Chandragupta Chakravarti Charitram" by Aiyar was written by him "with the only object of presenting to my readers the glorious heroes of the Indian nation." Besides being an inspiring work, it was also scholarly; it contained a cogent dissertation on Chandragupta's dates, upsetting theories by earlier scholars.

"Mahatma Booker T. Washington", was the sixth of the volumes by Aiyar put out by Kamba Nilayam. It was a biography of the famous Negro leader who rose from slavery to found the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1881, the year Aiyar was born. The Tuskegee Institute was a milestone in Negro education and Aiyar followed its pattern in later years when he established his Tamil Gurukulam school in Shermadevi. In an essay, "Jana Seva" appended to this book, Aiyar has prophetically anticipated Mahatma Gandhi's Basic Education Scheme of education-through-work. Aiyar's book on Booker Washington came in 1919, and his Tamil Gurukulam was established in 1922-23.

The last volume to come out under the Kamba Nilayam imprint in Pondicherry was the annotated translation in Tamil of Emerson's famous essay titled "Self Reliance". In placing this timeless treasure before the Tamil public, Aiyar in a preface discussed the merits of Emerson, Carlyle and Ruskin, three authors who greatly moulded the thinking of the nineteenth century. "Carlyle was like a school-master, cane in hand; Ruskin's style was beautiful and enticing, but thinking was feminine;

but in Emerson, the presentation would be grand without being hindered by hysterics," says Aiyar. "The essence of all that Emerson taught throughout his entire life," says Aiyar in the preface to his translation of "Self Reliance", (titled in Tamil "Thannambikkai"), "is contained in this single essay. It is because of that we have ventured to translate and present it here. If the people of Tamil Nadu desire to see Emerson's other essays also, we shall translate them too one by one."

Noting that Emerson's principles agreed with Vedantic concepts in many respects, Aiyar gave striking similarities by footnotes containing the appropriate quotations from the Upanishads, the "Gita" and the works of the Siddhas of Tamil Nadu and others.

The Preface is dated October 1919.

While the book "Chandragupta Chakravartiyin Charitram" was sold out in no time and a second edition was called for, the translation of Emerson's essay "Self Reliance" did not sell so fast. Nor did the Tamil people urge the translation of Emerson's other essays.

When one remembers that also in Pondicherry poet Bharati was languishing without patronage for the publication of his immortal poem "Panchali Sapatham," the first part alone of which he was able somehow to get printed, we must say that Aiyar was lucky to have sold out two editions of at least one of his books!

One of the most precious of Aiyar's books has been lost to posterity because of its proscription by the British at the time of its publication. The book is "Napoleon", a biography in Tamil which also discusses Napoleon's military strategy. Aiyar had, as we had noted earlier, improved his knowledge of French mainly to study the works on Napoleon and his letters in French. His aim in discussing Napoleon's military

strategy was to inspire interest in military science in the minds of the Tamil reader. It is a pity that the book was confiscated and has been lost for all time.

Another work, "Augustin Munivarin Vinnappam", was serialised in "Gnana Bhanu", Subramania Sivam's Tamil monthly from Madras. It has not so far been published in book form.

XIII

CONVERTED BY GANDHIJI

BARRISTER MOHANDAS Karamchand Gandhi of South African Satyagraha fame returned to India on the 9th of January 1915.

It was war time. Politics in India was in a lull.

As soon as he landed in India, Gandhi took to Swadeshi dress; discarding his Western suit, and donned a dhoti, jubba, and a big Kathiawad turban, with a cloak thrown over his shoulders.

Gandhiji told pressmen interviewing him that he was going to follow his master Gokhale's advice to spend some time observing conditions in India before actively taking part in politics. He actually spent two years like this travelling widely all over India and getting a first-hand impression.

Both Gokhale and Gandhiji were keen on the latter joining the Servants of India Society; but others in the Society felt that as his methods were so different from theirs it was but proper that he should be allowed in only as a probationer. Gandhiji signalised his entry into the Society as a probationer by cleaning the latrines of the Society's colony. This was not to the taste of many members, and Gokhale persuaded him to abandon that work.

Gandhiji went to Bombay, Poona, Kathiawad, Santiniketan in Bengal, Rangoon, Hardwar, and Rishikesh

before going south to Madras in April 1915. Gandhi's biographer Tendulkar says :

"Gandhiji and Kasturba alighted from a third-class compartment with a bundle of clothes as though they were a family of poor peasants. On the platform a strong contingent of leading citizens garlanded them and the crowd cheered him heartily. G. A. Natesan was his host. When Gandhiji and Kasturba were shown their apartments furnished with what seemed to the host the minimum of decent accommodation—two cots, a chair, table and a desk—Gandhiji asked for the removal of these emblems of luxury. He preferred the bare unfurnished room."

The citizens of Madras honoured Gandhiji and Kasturba with a reception at the Victoria Public Hall, G.A. Natesan, Secretary of the Indian South Africa League, reading the civic address. There were other engagements—a Law Dinner, a Y.M.C.A. meeting, and a party given by Mrs. Annie Besant under the great banyan tree.

Leaving Madras, Gandhiji travelled for a month in south India. In the course of these tours, he visited Pondicherry, where he met Aiyar, sought an interview with Sri Aurobindo which was not granted, and made no attempt to meet Bharati.

Sri Aurobindo, it seems, was not interested in meeting Gandhiji and turned down the request. Probably Sri Aurobindo did not wish to be once again dragged into political discussions.

As for Subramania Bharati, there is no record of his having met Gandhiji in Pondicherry. He is stated to have met Gandhiji for the first time only in Madras in March 1919, on the eve of the launching of the Non-co-operation Movement. Bharati had always been opposed

to violent methods and, as early as 1909, expressed support and admiration for Gandhiji's satyagraha efforts in South Africa. In fact, he had even collected funds for the South African Indian cause by appeals in the columns of his weekly "India". He had also praised Gandhiji and protrayed him in one of his cartoons as the honest cow that returned to the forest offering itself to be devoured by the tiger, after giving milk to her calf at home. It is therefore a real pity that Gandhiji and Bharati did not meet in Pondicherry when the former visited the place in 1915.

V.V.S. Aiyar was the only "Swadeshi" leader who met Gandhiji in Pondicherry in 1915. Probably, having met Gandhiji in 1909 in London, he made an effort to meet him when he heard of his visit to the town. Anyhow, since Aiyar was still believing in violent efforts to win Swaraj, the meeting could have been intended only as a courtesy call. But the result of the interview was a most unexpected one: Aiyar became a convert to Gandhiji's principle of ahimsa !

As an anonymous biographer of Aiyar has mentioned in a sketch of his life, "It was a case of *veni, vidi, vici* (came, saw, conquered). Gandhiji came, saw him, and conquered him. Aiyar became a convert to the principle of ahimsa and he who never went about without a revolver in his possession, now exchanged it for the *takli*. To his dying day Aiyar remained true to his new religion and there were moments when his closest friends wished that he was not such a staunch devotee of ahimsa."

Kavi-yogi Suddhananda Bharati, the Tamil poet who was as a young man an assistant in Aiyar's Bharadwaja Ashram and Tamil Gurukulam at Shermadevi in 1923-5, has said in his biography of Aiyar, that as a result of the meeting, "Aiyar was convinced that the path of

non-violence adumbrated by Gandhiji was the only way out." The Kavi-yogi adds that Aiyar used to murmur stanzas from Bharati's famous poems on the Mahatma whenever the thought of him came to his mind.

About what Aiyar told him regarding his meeting with the Mahatma in Pondicherry, Suddhananda Bharati writes : "Aiyar once told me, 'I had noted Gandhiji's successes in South Africa. Even at that time I had been fascinated by him. When I met him in London (in 1909), I only thought of him as addicted to Truth and as one with *tejas* (luminosity). That was a time when I had faith in the sword. At that time, Gandhiji urged that there was something more potent than violence, namely the spiritual strength. He also asked us to think about his new method of passive resistance, Satyagraha. It took a good number of years for us to gain faith in that. When I was convinced that by the methods of the Mahatma we could gain our objectives without shedding blood, my mind accepted him as the leader. The Mahatma is an unrivalled captain.' However, later on Aiyar told us, 'The defence of the country cannot do without armed might; we must build that up also...We must be strong ones, daring ones, dharmic ones'."

During his last years, Aiyar was almost obsessed with the idea of eradicating divisions in Tamil society by the creation of a single, united, casteless community "on the lines of the Sikhs". He wanted a strong, daring, dedicated community that would lay down its life for the Motherland.

Aiyar's conversion to Gandhism in 1915 surprised most people. That a lion-hearted revolutionary like him, who had master-minded the shooting of Collector Ashe as late as 1911, should become converted to *ahima* was top news. However, anyone who had followed the trend

of his writings in Tamil and English during his stay in Pondicherry would have noted how the violent revolutionary-terrorist was slowly mellowing into an ardent nation-builder wielding the pen instead of the sword.

Whatever changes might have taken place in Aiyar's mind, the Government was unwilling to accept that he was less dangerous now. The Sedition Committee Report on terrorist and revolutionary activities in India squarely blamed Aiyar for such activity in the Pondicherry area. The Report, prepared by the Committee headed by Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt, was published in July 1918, within a week of the announcement of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. The Sedition Committee had recommended some "emergency measures" of a punitive nature to deal with terrorism and revolutionary activity in India. It was the introduction of legislation on this basis that led to Mahatma Gandhi initiating his Non-co-operation Movement against the Government of India.

The Sediton Committee Report dealt with revolutionary activity province by province. In a brief chapter on Madras, the Report attributed all such activity to the visit to Madras in 1907 of Bepin Chandra Pal on a lecture tour. Nilakanta Brahmachari and V.V.S. Aiyar were mentioned as the brains behind revolutionary activity in the Madras Presidency. M.P. Tirumalachari, who was Manager of the "India" weekly and then went to London to join India House, was reported to be instigating it from the Paris end.

The relevant portions of the Report are :

"In September 1910 he (M.P. Tirumalachari) wrote from Paris to a member of the staff of the "India" in Pondicherry a letter in which he said that if they could not care to risk doing things worth doing at Pondicherry, the next best thing was to put their plans into practice

at some safe and suitable place and he expected them to do something of the sort soon.

"*Incubation of Murder* : At the time Acharya wrote his letter of September, a conspiracy against the British Government was being worked up in the Madras Presidency by Nilakanta Brahmachari (the first accused in the Tinnevelly Conspiracy Case of 1911). He had been going round Southern India both in 1910 and in previous years in company of Shankar Krishna Aiyar, preaching Swadeshi and sedition, and induced various persons in the Presidency to take a blood oath of association for the purpose of obtaining Swaraj. In June 1910 Shankar introduced Nilakanta to his brother-in-law, Vanchi Aiyar, a clerk in the Travancore Forest Department. Early in December 1910 V.V.S. Aiyar, who had been the right-hand man of Vinayak Savarkar at the India House and had subsequently gone to Paris and associated with Shamji Krishna Varma, Madame Cama and other plotters there, arrived in Pondicherry and started revolver practice for young Indians in certain gardens and preached the necessity of violence and assassinations to free the country. On the 9th of January 1911, Vanchi Aiyar took three month's leave and visited Pondicherry, where he was associated with V.V.S. Aiyar and indulged in revolver practice under his instructions. Evidence was given in the Tinnevelly Conspiracy Case that Vanchi had told one of the witnesses that English rule was ruining the country and that it could only be removed if all white men were killed, and suggested that Mr. Ashe should be first killed as being the head of the Tinnevelly district and an officer who had taken a leading part in the events of 1908. Vanchi also said that arms could be obtained from Pondicherry at the proper time.

"In searches of the houses of the accused conspirators in the Tinnevelly case, two pamphlets were found both of which purported to have been printed at the 'Feringhi Destroyer Press'. One entitled 'A Word of Advice to the Aryans' said : 'Swear in the presence of God that you will remove this sinner of a Feringhi from our country and firmly establish Swaraj therein. Take an oath that as long as the Feringhi exercises authority in our land of Bharata you will regard life as worthless. Beat the white Feringhi you get hold of, even as you beat a dog, and kill him with a knife, a stick, a stone or even by the hand given by God ' The other pamphlet was called 'The Oath of Admission into the Abhinav Bharat Society'. The evidence showed that ten copies of each pamphlet had been sent by post by one of the staff of the 'Dharmam' paper in Pondicherry to a person who had distributed and discussed them with the accused."

Narrating the circumstances leading to the murder of Ashe, the Sedition Committee Report added : "*Connection with Paris Anarchists* : In the April number of Madame Cama's paper called 'Bande Mataram', which was published in Paris about the end of May, there was some indication in one of the articles that a crime of this nature was in contemplation. It concluded with these words : 'In a meeting or in a bungalow, on the railway, or in carriage, in a shop, or in a church, in a garden or at a fair, wherever an opportunity occurs, Englishmen ought to be killed. No distinction should be made between officers and private people. The great Nana Sahib understood this, and our friends the Bengalis have also begun to understand. Blest be their efforts, long be their arm, now indeed we say to the Englishman, "Don't shout till you are out of the wood".' In a subsequent article dated July 1911, Madame Cama tried

to show that the recent assassinations were in accordance with the teachings of the Bhagvat Gita, stating : 'When the gilded slaves from Hindustan were parading the streets of London as performers in the royal circus and were prostrating themselves like so many cows at the feet of the King of England, two young and brave countrymen of ours proved by their daring deeds at Tinnevelly and Mymensing that Hindustan is not sleeping.' (Sub-Inspector Rajkumar Ray had been murdered on the 19th of June at Mymensingh.)

"This article and the letter found on the murderer seem to show that the murder was designed to take place on the day of the Royal Coronation ceremonies.

"*Conclusions* : The result of the Tinnevelly Conspiracy trial was that nine accused persons belonging to different castes and grades of society were found guilty of conspiracy against the state but were not found to be guilty of the abetment of the murder of Mr. Ashe. It was pointed out by the Court how the binding nature of the oath taken by the conspirators had overcome the caste prejudices which are often a bar to intimate association in Southern India.

"Since the trial of the Tinnevelly conspirators there does not appear to have been any trouble from criminal revolutionary conspiracy in the Madras Presidency. We do not consider that there was any indigenous revolutionary movement in Madras, and but for the influence of Bepin Chandra Pal and the revolutionaries plotting in Paris and Pondicherry there would have been no trouble in Southern India."

With so much evidence against Aiyar, it is still a mystery why the British Government did not make him an accused, *in absentia*, in the Ashe Murder Case !

XIV

EDITOR, "DESABHAKTAN", MADRAS

AIYAR'S FAME as an author was well recognised by the literary and journalistic circles of Madras. He received frequent requests from editors in Tamil Nadu to contribute to their papers. One paper, particularly, the "Desabhaktan" daily of Madras, almost regularly carried contributions from his pen. In Pondicherry itself, "Kalaimagal", a monthly journal edited by R. Bangaru Patthar, became a vehicle for Aiyar's literary contributions

The "Desabhaktan" had been founded by a follower of Mrs. Annie Besant, M. Subbaroya Kamath, with the lady's blessings and financial support. In 1917, Mrs. Besant had entered Indian politics in a big way and inaugurated her Home Rule Movement. In this she was to gain the co-operation of Lokamanya Tilak. In order to propagate her line, Mrs. Besant purchased the old English daily "The Madras Standard" and re-named it "New India" under her able direction, "New India" became the most popular English daily in Madras, excelling such established rivals as "The Hindu". From proof-reading to financial control, Mrs. Besant kept a vigilant eye on every aspect of the paper.

M Subbaroya Kamath, a Sub-Editor in "New India", decided to help the cause by starting a Tamil daily. Mrs. Besant readily blessed his idea, and gave him a sizeable donation of Rs 3,000 with which Kamath

started the Tamil daily "Desabhaktan", in December 1917.

M.S. Kamath was an ardent disciple of Tilak and a staunch nationalist. He was a close friend of poet Bharati. He had a keen sense of social service. When during the War prices soared, he opened a fair price rice shop on his own.

Having learnt journalism and newspaper management in "New India" and "Desabhaktan", Kamath in subsequent years founded "The Sunday Times", the first week-end paper in India. "The Sunday Times" and Kamath did yeoman service popularising the nationalist cause as well as all the now well-known sages of modern India, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo and Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi.

"Desabhaktan" was an evening daily, and had for its first Editor a Tamil scholar, Tiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar. The paper did not have an easy start. The British were looking with disfavour on Mrs. Besant's Movement. They had demanded a security of Rs 20,000 for her "New India"; the amount was deposited, but it did not deter her from expressing herself freely. The security was forfeited. In June 1917, Mrs. Besant and two of her aides were interned. The action caused a furore in the country.

"Desabhaktan", coming out six months after this and sponsoring the same Movement, had to deposit a security of Rs 1, 000 before it would be permitted publication. In 1919, at the time of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, the security was forfeited and a fresh security of Rs 6, 000 was demanded and deposited.

"Desabhaktan" time and again pressed for the removal of bans on the re-entry of Indian patriots living in such places as Pondicherry. It helped to raise the matter in

the Madras Legislative Council, and ultimately the General Amnesty Order of 1920 was issued removing all restrictions. Bharati had not waited for the removal of these restrictions, and had soon after the end of the War entered British India near Cuddalore in November 1918. He was arrested, kept in prison for three weeks, and then released on an undertaking. But Aiyar waited till the Amnesty Order came.

Returning home to Tiruchi after fourteen years, he went on an all-India tour, both as a pilgrimage and as a study tour, before settling down to do anything. His mind was decided on setting up an educational institution.

He visited Poona, Bombay, Nasik, Sabarmati (where Gandhiji had established his Ashram), Delhi, Hardwar, Kangri, Mathura, Agra, Oudh, Gaya, and Kashi. In Kashi he took two vows : one, to devote himself to the rapid growth of his mother tongue Tamil, and two, to found an educational institution on the lines of the Arya Samaj Gurukul at Kangri.

In Kashi, Aiyar also attended the All India Congress Committee session as a visitor and met many leaders including Tilak.

When Aiyar returned to Madras after the tour in June 1920, he learnt that there had been differences of opinion between Editor Tiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar and M.S. Kamath. Tiru. Vi. Ka. was leaving "Desabhaktan" and Kamath was hoping to have Aiyar as his successor. Aiyar thought over the matter and finally accepted the offer. On July 31, 1920, V V S. Aiyar joined duty as Editor of "Desabhaktan" Tamil daily, Madras, on a salary of Rs. 150 per month.

"Desabhaktan" under Aiyar's guidance extended bold support to the Congress and the Khilafat Agitation. Aiyar's editorials were picked up by other papers which

reprinted them. Mrs. Besant's "New India" often reproduced English translations of Aiyar's comments. "Desabhaktan" was considered by most persons as the ablest successor of Bharati's weekly "India". In no time "Desabhaktan" gained the first place in circulation.

Though "Desabhaktan" was a daily, it provided magazine features as well. Serious and literary writing found space in its columns. Aiyar continued to maintain his interest in Kamba Nilayam, the publishing concern in Pondicherry. He would visit Pondicherry on and off for the purpose. The desire to publish a high-class monthly on the lines of Ramanand Chatterjee's "Modern Review" was still present in Aiyar's mind.

Like his mentor Savarkar, Aiyar, used to feel that Indian history had not been written correctly. Western authors had twisted historical events to suit their lines of thinking and presented the glories of Indian culture and heroism in utterly false colours. To rectify this, Aiyar was writing in English "A History of India"; he had filled several exercise notebooks with the chapters of this book. He would carry these notebooks with him most of the time, and would read portions to interested friends. Unfortunately, the book never saw the light of day and the manuscript is now well-nigh lost.

Aiyar was living in Triplicane, while the "Desabhaktan" office was in George Town in the northern part of the city. Dressed in a dhoti with *panccha kaccham*, a big flowered cotton shawl covering his shirtless body, a cotton handbag hanging from his left shoulder, Aiyar would walk "with the gait of an elephant" along the beach road to and from his office. He preferred to walk the few miles along the beach rather than take a jutka, which in those busless days was certainly costly.

Entering the office, Aiyar would greet his colleagues with

a smile and go to his seat. Mail and urgent matters disposed of, he would scan the English dailies and weeklies and the telegrams that had come. There were no teleprinters then and all telegrams were hand-delivered by the Telegraph Office or the news agency. Aiyar would give headings to the news items in the telegrams and pass them on to appropriate sub-editors for translation. Then he would start writing his editorial and notes. The flow of his sheets would be even. The sheets would be passed on to the press as soon as they were finished. His handwriting was legible, round and close linked.

Finishing his writing, he would visit the desks of his sub-editors, and with a friendly observation here and quick solution to some knotty problem in translation there, he would return to his room to correct the proofs flowing from the press, galley after galley. He saw all final proofs and approved everything that went into the paper. By four o'clock in the afternoon, the day's work would be over for the editors : the first copies of the paper would have come. After scanning the paper and advising his chief sub-editor about the next day's work, Aiyar would leave office, either walking back to Triplicane or going to some public meeting. An active Congressman, he was a good speaker.

A linguist who knew some ten languages, Aiyar was against polyglot speech. Speaking in Tamil, he would not mix English words. In discussions, he would quote with ease from Kamban and Kalidasa, Valluvan and and Valmiki, Homer and Virgil, Shakespeare and Dante. But his love for Kamban was supreme.

In matters of religion, he was a devout follower of rituals, but was not orthodox in the commonly understood sense. He was not averse to drinking coffee or eating tiffin brought by an office boy, whatever his caste,

as long as he was clean. He was fond of *ghee dosai* and invariably his afternoon tiffin consisted of a *ghee dosai* and a cup of hot coffee.

Aiyar's house in Triplicane was in an area where there were many Muslims. Aiyar was at home with them. He was a strong believer in Hindu-Muslim unity. He was a much sought after speaker at Khilafat meetings.

After office hours in the evenings, on days when there was no public engagement, Aiyar would go to the beach at Triplicane and sit in the sands opposite Queen Mary's College, with some colleagues or friends. The talk would mostly be about politics.

Aiyar was a fast walker. He would outpace everyone else. He liked to walk along a wet seashore. He liked enjoying the beauties of natural scenery. He would sometimes bring his daughter Subhadra and son Krishnamoorthy to enjoy the beauties of nature.

Aiyar was an actor of no mean stature. For a revolutionary who had had to pose consummately before alien detectives, acting was a natural ability. Once the staff of "Desabhaktan" decided to enact a play on the life of King Bhoja. Aiyar directed the show. Unfortunately by the time the play was ready for staging, the paper changed hands and many staff members had to leave.

Aiyar was soft-spoken even in argument. Harsh words would never escape his month. Even when some staff member had to be corrected for some mistake, he would show no anger or annoyance but speak in a convincing manner. This endeared him to his staff.

"Desabhaktan", for all its reputation, was not a paying proposition. On the other hand, because of the heavy demands of security by Government and the high cost of paper, "Desabhakatan" was running into debts. Two months after Aiyar joined, M.S. Kamath was forced to

sell the paper with its goodwill and press to a landlord of Kumbakonam, one S. Nageswara Sastri, to whom Kamath owed money on mortgage. The new owner landed Aiyar into endless trouble, thanks to his unprincipled wavering and fear of Government!

XV

JAILED FOR AN EDITORIAL

THE NEW owner of "Desabhaktan" continued to run the paper with the old staff for some months. But in February 1921, he proposed to change the name of the press to Commercial Printing and Publishing Co., Ltd., and nominated a friend of his, P.V. Rajagopalachari, as Editor of "Desabhaktan". In a communication to the Government, the owner promised that "nothing seditious would be published."

But there was no clear office order removing Aiyar from the editorship. Aiyar continued to work under a nebulous condition.

P.V. Rajagopalachari soon fell ill and a new arrangement was brought into effect—an Editorial Committee was formed consisting of Rajagopalachari, Aiyar and another person, Mahalinga Aiyar. Relations between Aiyar and the others were strained; Sastri, the owner, wanted to get rid of Aiyar "since Government looked upon Aiyar without much favour". But he did not have the courage straightaway to ask Aiyar to go.

Since his position ever since the new management took over was unclear, Aiyar had been pressing the new owner formally to appoint him as Editor; but the owner was postponing doing so. At length, in July 1921 Aiyar wrote out the conditions under which alone he would continue to hold editorial responsibilities and gave the

paper to the owner, Nageswara Sastri. At this time differences arose between Rajagopalachari (who by now had become joint owner) and Nageswara Sastri. As a result, Rajagopalachari issued an office order dispensing with Aiyar's services, while Nageswara Sastri issued an order appointing him as Editor!

Seeing the bickerings between the two owners, Aiyar decided to sever his connection with the paper, gave a month's notice and on August 18, 1921 left service, announcing the matter in "Desabhaktan" of the same date.

But trouble was still in store for him.

On September 9, 1921, on a complaint by the Crown, the Chief Presidency Magistrate, Madras, P.C. Lobo, issued non-bailable warrants against "P.V. Rajagopalachari, V.V.S. Aiyar and D. Mahalinga Aiyar, the joint editors of 'Desabhaktan' and S. Nageswara Sastri, the joint proprietor of the paper on a charge of Sedition under Section 124-A, I.P.C., in respect of a leading article entitled 'Repression' in the issue of the paper dated May 6, 1921." The police arrested all but Aiyar, and produced them before the Chief Presidency Magistrate who remanded two of them to custody. Aiyar was arrested on the 11th.

When news of the arrest of Aiyar spread throughout Triplicane, a large crowd followed him to the police station crying, "Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jai!" and "Allah-o-akbar!" Before he was taken away, Aiyar visited Yakub Hassan, the Congress leader, and Subramania Bharati, the poet, who was seriously ill and in his last moments. Bharati passed away that night.

The trial commenced on September 12. The court hall was crowded with legal practitioners and members of the public. The accused were dressed in khaddar and

looked cheerful. S. Satyamurti appeared for P.V. Rajagopalachari, 1st Accused; Aiyar, 2nd Accused, was undefended; T.S. Venkatesa Aiyar appeared for D. Mahalinga Aiyar and S. Nageswara Sastri, 3rd and 4th Accused. The two counsels retired later in the course of the trial "at the desire of the respective accused who intimated to the Court that they offered no defence consistent with the principle of non-cooperation."

Opening the Prosecution case, K.P.M. Menon, who was assisted by Sambasiva Rao and K.S. Jayarama Iyer, pointed out that the editorial titled "Repression" which was considered offensive, contained passages which were highly seditious, as it attributed dishonesty and callousness to the Government, preached hatred against it and called the ruling English race "fiendish".

The translation of the editorial showed it was a criticism of the new Viceroy, Lord Reading, whose rule promised a good deal of repression. Passages from the editorial considered objectionable included the following (as officially translated): "When, even in the very first month of the advent of this just Lord (Viceroy Lord Reading), the onrush of arrogance of authority is going on uncontrollably, it is a matter for apprehension as to what further changes of form his reign may, by and by, assume. For the very purpose of practising repression, they are keeping in readiness military forces and cannon at an expenditure of sixty-three crores of rupees...The Government which are boldly determined to spend sixty-three crores of rupees to save one murderous sinner of a Dyer—the Government which with a view to save the useless Dyer belonging to this fiendish race, and feeling that their prestige alone is great let whatever harm befall the country—the Government which have the mentality of venturing even to lose India itself for the sake of one

Dyer—what will not such a Government venture to do? It will therefore be unnecessary to mention here that we see only the beginning of the dance of repression..."

The Dyer mentioned is the obnoxious villain of Jallianwala Bagh shooting fame.

The Tamil Translator to the Government, Saravana Mudaliar, produced in the court not only his own translation of the editorial considered objectionable, but also brief extracts in translation from other editorials and news items considered objectionable as exhibits. The idea was to show that the editorial "Repression" was not a stray piece, but that the whole tenor of comments in the paper was objectionable. A sample from the exhibits: editorial in the issue of April 15, 1921: "*Sri Rama Navami:* Famine and pestilence are affecting the country and men have lost their capacity to discriminate between righteousness and unrighteousness...A spirit of liberty and true utterance provokes Government. It is in these circumstances that Mother Bharata invokes her favourite deity. Perhaps the Mother of the universe is waiting for the call of her children... Let us therefore worship on this day Lord Sri Rama, the destroyer of Rakshasas, praying to him to incarnate in the world to get rid of sin and establish righteousness."

When the trial continued on the 17th September, the three accused (other than Aiyar) who had struck a heroic pose on the 12th by offering no defence "consistent with the principles of non-cooperation", proved what men of straw they were. V.N. Shama Rao, counsel appearing on their behalf, submitted that the three persons expressed their sincere regret and apologised to the Government for any offence they might have committed by publishing the editorial titled "Repression" and that they undertook not to commit any such offence in the future.

The Crown Prosecutor announced that Goverment had accepted their apology and ordered withdrawal of the cases against them. The Magistrate discharged the three persons.

Now the case against V.V.S. Aiyar alone remained.

When Aiyar made a statement before the court after prosecution had concluded its evidence, he narrated the circumstances under which he had been working in "Desabhaktan" and under which he had finally severed his connection with the paper. Regarding the offending editorial of May 6, he revealed that it was not written by him. He had been away on a lecture tour in Ramnad District; he had left Madras on May 1 and returned only on the 9th. He had written nothing in the paper from May 1 to 9.

But, Aiyar refused to accept that the editorial in question was objectionable. He said : "I have since read the article in question and find that it does not contain anything which can bring the writer thereof under Section 124-A, I.P.C. or any other Section."

Pleading "Not Guilty", Aiyar added: "If after perusing the above, the Court thinks I am guilty. I am ready cheerfully to undergo any imprisonment that it may give me."

The Crown Prosecutor said he would accept Aiyar was not the writer of the editorial, but this did not absolve him of editorial responsibility. The editorial was objectionable and he was liable.

Judgement was delivered in the case on September 19, 1921. The Chief Presidency Magistrate sentenced Aiyar to nine months' simple imprisonment. "The Hindu" report of the day adds : "The Court hall was crowded. The daughter, son and wife of Mr. V V.S. Aiyar were present in the hall. After the judgment was

delivered and a sentence of nine months' simple imprisonment was pronounced, Mr. V.V.S. Aiyar was taken out of the Court. Near the police lock-up, Mrs. Aiyar and a large number of Hindu and Mahomedan friends (Khilafat and Congress workers) garlanded him. Mrs. Aiyar expressed her joy at her husband's going to jail for the noble services he had rendered for the good of the country. His daughter prostrated before him saying that by his imprisonment the goal of Swaraj was getting nearer. Mr. V.V.S. Aiyar was taken in a motor car by the police amidst cries of 'Mahatmaki-jai !' "

While the real culprit who wrote the editorial got away apologising, Aiyar, who had nothing to do with it but had joint legal responsibility as editor, refused to find it offensive or to apologise. And, while the others were discharged, Aiyar was sent to jail. Obviously, though the case was launched for a single editorial, the Government's object must have been to put an end to the virulent attacks on Government by "Desabhaktan". Aiyar's refusal to apologise for an editorial that he did not write came in very handy for the Government

Aiyar was first taken to the Penitentiary, Madras, but was later transferred to Bellary Central Jail.

Aiyar's jail term benefited Tamil literature. It was during this jail term that he saw the fruition of one of his long-abiding desires, namely, the writing of a masterly study in English of the Tamil Ramayana of Kamban, with a good number of Kamban's verses translated into English.

Kamban, the greatest of epic poets in Tamil, is acknowledged as "Kavi-Chakravarti". His Ramayana, though based on Valmiki's story, differs in detail here and there, and many embellishments are put in by Kamban. Aiyar had been fascinated by Kamban's work even in his young

days. In the very first month of his arrival in London, we find an entry in his London Notebook translating some verses of Kamban. And, in 1910, when he had to vacate his hotel in a hurry to escape arrest, among the things that he remembered to take with him in his small suitcase was the full set of Kamban's Ramayana! He carried the volumes with him all the way to Pondicherry, travelling under different guises.

The first indication that, in Bellary jail, he was seriously at work on his study of the Ramayana of Kamban was provided by the letter he wrote after some months of his jail term to his friend B. Adimurti of Kashi. In that letter Aiyar stated that his first three months had been spent in literary effort, and that some hundred pages of matter in the book were ready. But he was in need of the English translations of Valmiki Ramayana and Tulsi Ramayana by Griffith, andLokamanya Tilak's book 'Gita Rahasya". Would Adimurti please procure the books and send them to him ?

Adimurti sent him the books. Aiyar also referred to the various other versions of the Ramayana prevailing in other Indian languges. He made himself conversant with Bhaskara Ramayana in Telugu, and took down notes from it.

Aiyar was consistent and meticulous in his work. His daily output was enormous. "Between the leaves of Aiyar's rough manuscripts," says a biographer of his, "was found a faded cutting from a newspaper quoting records in daily or weekly output of writing by famous authors. Dr. Johnson's 'Rasselas' of a little more than 20,000 words produced in a week, Mark Twain's 4,000 words a day, Stevenson, Guy de Maupassant, Balzac, Hutchinson of 'If Winter Comes' fame, Oppenheim and Wells have inspired Aiyar. His manuscripts show dates

and number of words written each day. In nine months of prison life with its unbending routine, Aiyar lags not far behind these masters with his work of a little over 1,40,000 words, more than a third of which is set in verse."

XVI

"KAMBA RAMAYANAM—A STUDY"

"KAMBA RAMAYANAM— A Study", which is considered V. V. S. Aiyar's *magnum opus*, is a literary work challenging in its nature. The very opening sentence of the book throws the gauntlet:

"It is not easy to convince the literary world at this late hour of the day that there is, unsuspected by the greater part of it, a Tamil poet who is worthy to take rank with the greatest names in literature. It is, however, my purpose in this book to make an attempt to prove that in the Ramayana of Kamban the world possesses an epic which can challenge comparison not merely with the 'Iliad' and the 'Aeneid', the 'Paradise Lost' and the 'Mahabharata', but with its original itself, namely, the 'Ramayana' of Valmiki. This is not the language of mere patriotic enthusiasm. It is an opinion that has grown slowly with the years and after deep and careful study. And I hope to make the impartial reader rise from the study of this monograph with a conviction of the truth of my contention and with a desire to know more of the poet than what he will see exhibited within the pages of this volume."

This is followed by a further assertion: "I spoke of Valmiki's work as the original of Kamban's Ramayana. But Kamban has not translated Valmiki. He has merely taken the story immortalised by the Aryan sage and,

though he has followed it closely enough in all its details, has written an entirely original poem. Bentley said of Pope's 'Iliad', 'It is a pretty poem, but you must not call it Homer.' Of Kamban's Ramayana we should say reversing the language, 'It is not Valmiki Ramayana, but it is a grander poem.' "

Of course, it is easy to make such assertions in a casual speech or article. But, in Aiyar's case, he was making these statements in a serious book with a view to adducing proof to convince the truth of what he was saying. He deals with literary theories about the narration, theories about the build and structure of the story, the place of supernatural elements in epics, and the delineation of the various characters of the story. Sketching his canvas wide, he quotes from Greek and English authorities, as well as Sanskrit and Tamil masters of literature. Whatever statement he makes, he tries to substantiate by evidence from the world's literatures. Comparative studies of the characters of other epics are also made to show how Kamban excels. Some four thousand verses from Kamban's Ramayana are rendered into English —mostly in English verse—for the purposes of the book. This task of translating a third of the Ramayana by Kamban is by itself a monumental achievement, leave alone the arguments in support of its greater comparative merit. The vast. erudite, multilingual learning and scholarship of Aiyar shows brilliantly on every page. The authorities he has cited for literary dicta include Aristotle, Horace, Milton, Boileau, Valmiki, Dandin, Chateaubriand. and Virgil, while those with whom he compares Kamban's Ramayana include the Ramayanas of Valmiki, Tulsidas and Bhaskara (Telugu poet), and the works of Homer, Virgil and Milton.

Should a poem be chronological in narration, or should

it follow the age-old theory of the West that it should have a dramatic opening *in medias res* (in the midst of things) ? Aiyar discusses this point thus : "The reader will have noticed that the Ramayana follows in its natural order the life of the hero from his birth and childhood upto the close of the action which forms its theme. On the other hand, the epics of Europe, as is well known, follow their prototype and example, the 'Iliad', and start the story as near the end as possible, filling in the earlier events by slight allusions as well as by episodic narrative. These epics have an undeniable advantage over the Indian *maha kavyas* in that their dramatic opening arrests the imagination even at the very commencement of the poem, while the Indian epics have to gather momentum before they are able to carry with them the attention of the modern reader. But our great epic poets have proved one may tell a story in the chronological order and yet write a poem that generations will not willingly let die." Quotations from the Poetics of the West and East follow, and a discussion is presented at some length about the two different types of openings and their advantages and disadvantages.

Then follows a consideration of the question of "architectonics", the build and structure of the poem. On this, Aiyar observes : "The build and structure of the Ramayana of Kamban are superb. The poem satisfies the soul with its *ampleur*, the proportion of its parts, and the art with which the parts are combined into an organic whole...Kamban has shown his genius for the architectonics of poetry both where he follows Valmiki as well as where he departs from his order."

On Kamban's treatment of the story, Aiyar has this to say : "Now the plot in almost all its details is Valmiki's.

But if Kamban takes the situations from Valmiki, he has treated them absolutely in his own way. In the manner of developing the situations, in the gradation by which the climax of each situation is brought about, in the *justesse* which knows how to bring about all its capabilities out of each situation, we feel the touch of the master-artist. In the manner also in which the incidents have been joined together to form the whole, no ordinary skill has been displayed Every limb of Kamban's story is of course familiar to the student of of Valmiki. But on going through the whole poem of Kamban, one is constrained to exclaim, 'Here is a building which is built on the same plan no doubt, and with the same materials, but which possesses a striking individuality of its own.' "

Characterisation is another point on which Kamban scores, says Aiyar. "In the delineation of character," he writes, "Kamban stands on a level with the greatest poets in the world. The lines are drawn with a firm hand, and the characters are painted with such accuracy and fullness that from any single sentence, and sometimes even from a single phrase in a speech, one can tell the person speaking without any the least doubt.

"Here too, Valmiki has set the stamp on the characters of the Ramayana. But in Kamban's hand they have become much more grand. The student of Valmiki will wonder how his Rama and Bharata, Ravana and Kumbhakarna, Vali and Hanuman, Sita and Kausalya, and the rest could be improved. The fact, however, is there that Kamban's heroes and heroines are beings of a decidedly higher stature than those of Valmiki."

These are not statements that would go unchallenged by other scholars of eminence. Aiyar was not unaware of this. That was why he chose to render into English

almost a third of Kamban's Ramayana, so that the reader could judge for himself. Aiyar was no chauvinist bragging about his own language and his own poetic hero. He was not rousing a rabble. All his interests were purely literary : it was literary discussion of a high order that he desired. Whether he carried conviction at once or not, he was content to have the literary aspects of Kamban's achievements argued by scholars who could look beyond personal predilections.

"Kamba Ramayanam—A Study" was published posthumously, a quarter century after Aiyar's demise, in 1950. In the twenty-eight years since its publication, the work has earned the respect of scholars of different persuasions. Today it is accepted as one of the best works of literary criticism on a Tamil subject.

Translation of poetry is a difficult art; translating poetry into poetry in another language is harder still. Aiyar has achieved remarkable success in this respect. Rama, the hero, is portrayed in all his tenderness of love, his burst of anger over injustice, in his pitiable wailings over the fall of Lakshmana, and in a hundred other situations. Aiyar's translations bring out the effect of Kamban's characterisations well.

Here is Rama's description of Sita, as he gave his final instructions to Hanuman before his departure in search of her :

'Even the lotus has its petals pale,
The moon has got its spot, and where is form
Of any kind without the slightest fault ?
But thou wilt see no imperfection mar
Her shapely form. Great Brahma made the flute
And *vina*, parrots, *koils*, and children's babble,
And then he coped all sweetness with her voice :

But nought could he create to parallel
Her speech and tone; and can he e'er succeed
If he should try ev'n now for all his life ?
Though earth and heaven should search to find its like
What can approach *amrit* in taste ? And what
Can e'er compare with the sweetness of her speech ?
Thou think'st of honey and *amrit* : but can
They e'er delight the ear?...'

Here is Sita in a humour over the Golden Deer. Lakshmana says he would rather go and bring the Golden Deer himself. At this Sita is annoyed : as though her husband's valour has been slighted. Says she to Rama:

Pouting her ambrosia-dropping ruby lips
Like a sweet-tongued parrot young she lisped, 'Then, thou
Wouldst not thyself pursue and capture him
For me ?', and left him with tears flowing down
Her cheeks. But Rama could not bear to see
Her in a pet, and said, 'My golden love,
Behold I myself go and shall bring
Him in a trice.'

The wrathful Rama is pictured here : on his hearing from Jatayu that it is Ravana who has carried away Sita :

He scarce spoke when rushed the blood at once
To Rama's eyes; a storm was in his breath;
A frown settled on his manly brow; the spheres
In terror shook; the stars their orbit fled!...
The worlds lay crouching lest his sudden wrath
Should burst on them; when with a smile that meant

Destruction dire, he thus addressed the bird :
'Behold the world on its stable axis moves
And Gods unmoved look on, while in their sight
A Rakshas carries off a helpless dame,
And thou art mangled thus in her defence!
I will destroy them all in one single ruin.
The stars shall scattering fall! The sun shall burst !
The void of heaven shall shimmer with the light
Of burning spheres! And water, air, and fire
And all that lives and moves shall soon dissolve
To their embryon atoms! And my wrath shall end
The gods themselves in heaven. And thou wilt see
The circling universe and all that lies
Beyond, burst like a bubble in a stream!'

A battle scene—the fight between Indrajit and Lakshmana, when Indrajit invoking the Maheshwara Astra against Lakshmana attacks him with all his might :

The world-consuming fire now issued from
Its loins, and now the whirlwind sweeping clean
The earth and all that lives on Judgment Day.
And now the waters of the seas beyond
The seven did issue forth from its entrails.
The sky it darkened as with outer darkness,
The gods in terror fled, and Rishis left
With whitened face the field; the Vanar host
Sank in despair upon the ground; and moon
And sun and all the worlds their orbits swerved
In fear! Vibhishan trembled at the sight
And called the holy name aloud of Ram,
But lion-like Lakshmana only smiled...

But Lakshmana falls a prey to Indrajit's Brahmastra.

With him in a swoon, Rama laments :

'I died not when I heard of our father's death,
Though he a kingdom gave, for in thy love
I learnt to forget his loss : but thee now dead,
What's life to me ? I come, my brother, I come.
But wert thou brother alone? Thou wert to me
A child and father, mother and blessings all :
And thou art gone! And thou art gone without
A farewell said. Alas! have I become
More cruel than thee? For I see thee dead
And still, pretending sorrow, I bear to live.
My heart is made of stone, it breaketh not;
E'en thy loss I shall bear and cling to life!...'

"The episode of Hiranya-Kasipu is one of the few additions that Kamban has contributed to the story of the Ramayana," points out Aiyar. This story of the Narasimha Avatar is narrated by Vibhishana in Ravana's Council to warn him that a Rakshasa mightier than himself was destroyed by Vishnu.

The incident of Vali is also dealt with in a more convincing manner by Kamban than Valmiki, according to Aiyar. Space forbids detailed quotations on the Rama-Vali dialogue after Vali is felled.

Hanuman's grief at not having discovered Sita in Lanka is portrayed by Kamban thus :

'Alas, that jewelled one is not in this
Extensive fort. Has he, perchance, killed her
Because she would not yield her charms to him ?
Or has he eat her in wicked rage ?
Or haply does he hold her captive close
In another world ? I know not what to think

Or where to search for her?...'

Here's how he discovers her :

There in the midst of black-skinned Rakshasis
Seated as a flash of lightning in the bosom
Of a sable cloud, he saw the sun-flower bright
That smiles alone to the light of Kaushtubha—
The brilliant sun-like gem on Rama's breast.

Aiyar had proposed to complete his book with the character study of Sita as delineated by Kamban. But, unfortunately, he did not complete it while he was working on the book in Bellary jail. And, though Aiyar lived four more years after this, somehow he did not find time to take up this work again and complete it. As a result the book was incomplete, and did not get published. It was by sheer accident that the book was completed by an admirer of Aiyar's and published in 1950.

Kamban, "the king of poets in Tamil', is better known outside his Tamil country now than at Aiyar's time. His Ramayana has been translated in part by the eminent son of India,C. Rajagopalachari, and published under UNESCO auspices. But Aiyar's work still continues to hold the field as not only providing a sizeable translation but also a good study of Kamban's work in comparison with Valmiki's and the world's greatest poetical works.

XVII

TAMIL GURUKULAM

As soon as Aiyar came out of Bellary Jail, his wife and children who had been staying in nearby Tungabhadra Ashram of Swami Taraknath on the banks of the Tungabhadra river, joined him. The family went on a sightseeing tour of Hampi and Vijayanagar. A lover of fine arts, Aiyar was greatly fascinated by the artistic splendour of medieval India which could still to be seen in the two towns.

After the visit, he went to Tiruchi and lived there for some time in the ancestral house at Varakaneri. He took active part in Congress work and became a member of the Tiruchi District Congress Committee executive.

Since he had resigned from "Desabhaktan" even before going to jail, he was without a job. Of the two vows that he had taken in Kashi, he had tried to discharge to some extent the one to work for the improvement of his mother tongue, Tamil. His work in "Desabhaktan" and his book on Kamban's Ramayana had contributed somewhat towards this objective. But his heart was bent on starting a quality Tamil monthly which would really promote improvement of Tamil. But before this objective could be gained, there was the other vow on establishing an educational institution on national lines, which should be tried. Once the educational institution was established, it was possible to tack the monthly journal on to it.

The reasons that impelled Aiyar to think of starting an educational institution on new lines were twofold: one, he had, in studying the life of the Negro leader Booker T. Washington, noted how he combined work and education and thereby benefited the students in many ways; two, one of Mahatma Gandhi's programmes in connection with his non-cooperation movement was "the triple boycott" of Government jobs, courts, and educational institutions. Gandhiji, in order to fill the void, had advised the starting of educational institutions on modern and national lines independent of the Government's educational system. In November 1920, he had himself started the Gujarat Vidyapith, "the National University of Gujarat", at Ahmedabad. Gandhiji had hoped that a spirit of independence would be fostered, not only by the methods of study, but also by nation-wide vocational training. He desired to gradually organise higher schools that would spread education throughout the towns and filter it down to the masses, so that the suicidal cleavage between the educated and the uneducated would be bridged. "And, as an effect of giving industrial education to the genteel folks," he said, "and a literary education to the industrial classes, the unequal distribution of wealth and social discontent will be considerably checked."

Aiyar went round Tamil Nadu looking for a suitable place to start his educational institution, which he proposed to name "Tamil Gurukulam". The sites he saw in Kodambakkam on the outskirts of Madras, and Mannargudi and Vennatrinkarai in Thanjavur district were not to his satisfaction.

At this time Aiyar was asked to preside over a Congress conference in Koilpatti in Tirunelveli district. After the conference he happened to visit Kallidaikuricchi, a town a little distance away. The staff of the Taluk Board

School in Kallidaikuricchi had, following Gandhiji's call for non-cooperation with the authorities, walked out of the school, and later started in its place the "Tilak Vidyalaya", a national educational institution. When Aiyar visited the place, he was requested to take charge of the Vidyalaya. Aiyar agreed, and this Vidyalaya which was located at first in Ramalinga Aiyar Thottam in Kallidaikuricchi became the nucleus for Aiyar's Tamil Gurukulam.

Aiyar started the Tamil Gurukulam and all the facilities and equipment of Tilak Vidyalaya became Gurukulam property. He established the Bharadwaja Ashrama as the managing institution of the Gurukulam.

Although a start had been made, the Vidyalaya was still a far cry from Aiyar's dream. For the time being, all teaching was done in a routine manner. The only change was that all resident students followed a strict discipline, getting up early in the morning, washing their own vessels and clothing, saying prayers systematically and offering obeisance to Mother India daily. The students went on *bhajan* parties and collected rice for the Vidyalaya. Excursions to the Kalyani Falls nearby were frequent and swimming bouts in the Tamraparani river were common.

Aiyar was still on the look-out for a suitable place for his Gurukulam. He inspected many places in the vicinity. He was keen that the place should have beautiful natural surroundings which would inspire calm study. Such a place—three miles south of the Tamraparani river and a mile and a half from the railway station—came up for sale at that time. A fertile thirty-acre ground, with shady trees and well and the pleasing hills of Kolundia Malai a mile to the south, it was an ideal location. More than fifty years later, the site continues to retain its

sylvan character even today, which is a tribute to the foresight and excellance of Aiyar's judgement.

The price for which the thirty-acre ground was offered for sale, Rs 3,000, was also tempting. But Aiyar had no ready money. He was literally a pauper. He had given up everything for the sake of the country. Aiyar issued an appeal in the Press for funds. Fortunately, a philanthropist from the rich Nattukkottai Chettiar community, Vayi. Su. Shanmukam of Kanadukatthan, came forward to donate the amount needed for completing the purchase. On an auspicious day, Aiyar moved his Tamil Gurukulam to the new place in Shermadevi.

Aiyar's vision was an idealist one. He wanted the Gurukulam to meet most of its needs by itself. In this he was greatly inspired by the example of Booker T. Washington. A part of the grounds of the Gurukulam was devoted to rice cultivation, a part to growing pulses, and all cultivation work was done by the boys of the Gurukulam themselves guided by experienced village folk. Coconut and mango trees provided edible nuts and fruits. A few large banyan trees spread their branches wide to give a shady atmosphere for outdoor classes. A love of nature and devoted cultivation of plants and trees was part of the daily curriculum. Working on the soil, the boys learnt soil science, botany, the role of fertilisers, the usefulness of water, a cultivation economics.

As buildings had to be added for the Gurukulam for its daily growing needs, Aiyar thought it best to follow Booker T. Washington's precept. Washington had his teachers and students cut bricks and build their buildings themselves. The buildings in the Shermadevi Gurukulam were initially all simple structures: the flooring and walls were made of brick, with roofing of bamboo poles

and coconut fronds. Students and teachers dug the foundation, filled it with stones, brought sand to fill the basement, cut bricks and burnt them in the kiln, mixed up mortar, laid the bricks for the walls and gave a finish and whitewash to the walls. The cooking was also done by the Ashram inmates themselves, wives of some married members of the staff helping in the work. It was a simple cooperative colony, all persons sharing in the work.

Aiyar gave priority to the provision of a building for the Gurukulam library, to which he donated his three thousand books. The books were kept in bamboo racks. Proper safeguards were made to prevent attack by white-ants. *Neem* leaves were found to be very good for preventing attack of books by silver-fish. A few leaves kept between the stiff wrappers and the body of the book kept these pests away.

Shortly after the Gurukulam moved into Shermadevi, a printing press was established, with a treadle, an Eagle press and types in English and Tamil. This was the press from which Aiyar's second dream, his monthly journal was to issue some time later. Named "Bala Bharati", the journal kept up a high standard during its short existence. It had to be closed down after Aiyar's sudden demise in 1925.

The press also printed a second edition of Aiyar's "The Maxims of Tiruvalluvar". All of Aiyar's literary works were turned over to the Bharadwaja Ashram, the managing body of the Gurukulam, so that income from the sale of these books by Aiyar could help meet in part the financial needs of the institution.

Aiyar's objectives in starting his Gurukulam were to create, to put it in his own words, "a new race of brave Tamils" who would be educated, cultured and able to

stand on their own legs without begging for jobs in offices. They were to learn a trade even while studying; they were to have practical experience of it in the course of the study. The Gurukulam was not to be another "manufactory of clerks". He wanted Tamil youth to be "men of heroic mould".

Besides technical trades, the boys learned literature, philosophy, fine arts, science, geography, history, medicine and social welfare. An advertisement of the Gurukulam said, "Teaching in the English language will be imparted preparing the students to equal the B.A. level. In Tamil, classic education including the Sangam poetry and Tolkappiam grammer will be taught. Students will be trained in European methods of scientific discovery. Mathematics, history, Sanskrit and Hindi the National Language, will also be taught. Among trades, spinning and weaving, carpentry and agriculture will be learnt by the students."

As time went by, and as the press got going, composing and printing were added to the trades taught.

Though Aiyar aimed his school to be self-sufficient, it could not be so, at least in the beginning. Capital investment for tools and machinery and equipment had to be arranged; money was also needed for purchasing raw materials, provisions for the kitchen and for the minimum paid labour employed in building or field work. Fund-raising was a constant problem for Aiyar. He sent appeals through Gurukulam students and staff, and issued through the press. The Tamil weeklies, "Navashakti", "Tamil Nadu" and "Kumaran", the Tamil daily "Swadesamitran" and the English daily "The Hindu", all extended support. Aiyar met leaders of public opinion; many promised donations, some kept their promise. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, old comrade of the London

"India House" who was a leading surgeon in Tiruchi, sent sizeable amounts. S. Srinivasa Aiyangar, that generous patron of all national causes in Madras, promised help.

Aiyar thought that the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee could extend help to this national institution. Rajaji advised Aiyar against it. Rajaji felt that such aid would affect the freedom of management that Aiyar had in running the institution. But, unfortunately, Aiyar did not listen to the advice, to his regret later. The Committee sanctioned Rs 10,000, and a cheque for Rs 5,000 was handed over. Even in this, there were some internal differences in the Committee. Rajaji's forebodings proved true and a bitter controversy, spear-headed by the Committee President Dr. P. Vardarajulu Naidu, virtually wrecked the institution.

The students paid a fee of twelve rupees each. A few, too poor to pay, were provided education free. Whenever there was urgent need for funds, Aiyar made a trip to Madras and came back with fairly sufficient funds. Along with funds would also come bundles of books, treasured additions to the library. Aiyar was always enthusiastic after these trips; he would say he would make his Gurukulam another Nalanda or Takshashila!

The daily routine at the Gurukulam started at 4 a.m. with Aiyar getting up first. He would finish his ablutions and at 4.30 a.m. give a blast on a whistle. All inmates would get up. Brushing their teeth, they would do exercise. They would then go out for calls of nature. Aiyar was strict that indiscriminate committing of nuisance was not done—everyone would go with a small spade, dig a small pit about six inches deep in selected areas, and close up the pit after use. Incidentally, a similar

practice was followed by Mahatma Gandhi in his Ashrams.

In exercise, gymnastics, drill, yogic asanas, wrestling, all were included. Aiyar was a lover of physical fitness himself. He himself would join in many of the exercises and games.

After cleaning their vessels, washing their clothes, and bath, they would all assemble for Inspiration Hour by 7.30 a.m. Aiyar would tell them the lives of the great and the noble.

Food was *sattvic*; no coffee or tea was given to the boys or teachers; they all took gruel (*kanji*). Tamarind and red chillies were not used in the kitchen; instead, they used pepper and lime.

Aiyar himself never took a square meal on normal days. At 11 a.m. he would take some coconut kernel, plantain fruit and groundnut, and some cooked rice. In the night, he took some fruit, coconut kernel and groundnut. Only on Amavasya days, when there would be a feast, would Aiyar take normal food, sitting for food with everyone.

Medical treatment was on naturopathic lines.

Aiyar had a love for the hymns of Ramalinga Swamigal, whose verses would invariably be sung for morning prayer. Aiyar read and explained portions of Tilak's "Gita Rahasya" to the boys. When he wrote the life of Guru Gobind Singh, he read his manuscript at the students' assembly before sending it to the press. Kamban's Ramayana was another common source of Aiyar's lectures.

"Bala Bharati", the Tamil monthly, started by Aiyar to discharge his second vow, came out in October 1924. Though it had a brief existence of only eleven months, having to be closed down three months after Aiyar's

demise in June 1925, it has earned a place of its own in the world of Tamil journalism.

Writing to a friend as early as 1920, Aiyar had said, "I consider it my prime patriotic duty to bring out works in Tamil which will enable the Tamils to get at all the knowledge and all the arts through the Tamil language itself. It is the prime task which I wish to dedicate myself to. Only to enable me do this without being bogged down by day to day wants do I occasionally take recourse to English works... I wish to present not only the 'Silappadikaram', 'Manimekhalai' and 'Jeevaka Chintamani', but also the Sangam poetical works in lucidly printed editions like my Bala Kandam of Kamban's Ramayana.

"But I have more ambitious dreams too. Just as Alexandre Dumas has depicted the whole of French history in delectable tales and made every Frenchman aware of the greatness of the history of his land, I want to present the whole of Tamil Nadu's history by enticing tales of fiction. Paari and Nannan, Kapilar and Nakkirar, Karikalan and Senguttuvan, Raja Raja and Rajendra and Vijayalaya, the Nayanmars like Sundaramurti and Vaishnavite Acharyas like Ramanuja and Desika—I wish to portray all these great men as heroes of my tales. If this task of presenting the manly traits of Tamil heroes is achieved, from the next generation onward who will despise Tamil literature and Tamil history?...It is with this in view that I have written, for practice, my tales like 'Mangayarkkarasiyin Kathal'. With this experience, I hope to be able in time to write larger historical works of fiction."

"For all these tasks," Aiyar continues, "a Tamil journal on hand is very essential. A paper similar to the 'Prabasi' in Bengali and 'The Modern Review' in English,

will enable enthusiasts to join in this game of creating literature of every type. An investment of three thousand rupees is a minimum need for this. It will be enough if thirty persons each take a share of a hundred rupees. But, after a whole year of importuning, only four persons have said they would think about it. I am never a pessimist. I still hope the objective will be achieved. But as it is unwise to keep idle until a major task is achieved, I am keeping myself busy otherwise with the above-mentioned works..."

"Bala Bharati" was a well-printed and well got-up journal, with a tri-colour wrapper and an artistic plate on art paper inside, coming out every month. The colour wrapper and art plate inside were new to Tamil journalism fifty years ago. Inside matter was of 64 pages, crown-quarto size. The first issue carried an editorial explaining the choice of the paper's name and its aims. The name was chosen, Aiyar wrote, to link Sarasvati's name with that of Poet Bharati, "a gifted friend of ours who twenty years ago started to give a new life to the people and language of Tamil Nadu."

Articles were promised on the literatures of all countries, "from China to Peru", and also biographical sketches and science articles, as well as political discussions and notes. Five articles, two stories, one serial, and two poems found place in the first issue, besides the monthly political notes.

"Bala Bharati" was welcomed as a new star in the firmament of Tamil journalism. Almost everywhere, except in some places, it was accepted as a journal of a high standard. Probably with nostalgic memories of friendships made in Bellary Jail, Aiyar sent a copy to the Jail authorities for circulation among permitted prisoners there. The paper was referred to the Criminal

Investigation Department of the Madras Government, and they, in all their wisdom, after deep study to be sure, advised the Jail authorities that the journal was unfit to be seen by jail inmates!

XVIII

FRIENDS MEET AGAIN

THE YEARS 1922 and 1923 were strenuous years for Aiyar. The Tamil Gurukulam, started in 1922, needed all his attention, it was having "teething troubles". A residential school imparting education not only in the arts and sciences, but also in vocational crafts and agriculture was a new idea. Aiyar himself had no experience of running an educational institution. But he had plenty of patience, and an unlimited will to learn. His attention to detail was remarkable. He went into every problem; whether it was cutting a tree into boards for doors and windows, or preparing raw earth for making bricks, he worked out every operation carefully and meticulously noted details in his diary. Entries in his diaries reveal how he had calculated everything and noted it for future guidance, such as how many logs and how many boards were obtained out of a particular tree, or how many bricks were obtained out of a particular pit dug out for the purpose. Every item of work, except things needing specialist attention, was handled by the boys and staff of the Gurukulam themselves, Aiyar joining them, when time permitted. Even de-silting of wells was done by them, thus saving a good deal of expense.

Aiyar travelled frequently, and in his diaries are noted the names of innumerable persons he met on his journeys, with full name, profession and postal address for

communication. He was a person who inspired enthusiasm in all those he met. This was helpful to the cause, no doubt.

A suggestion was made at this time that if Aiyar could send someone to Malaya, sizeable donations could be collected there. Aiyar sent his chief assistant, T. R. Mahadeva Aiyar, an advocate who had given up his profession at the call of Gandhiji and devoted himself to national work. He was "Upa-Acharya" of the Gurukulam, and one of the most dedicated workers of the institution. The response in Malaya was impressive; some money was collected and a great deal was promised. Mahadeva Aiyar returned to India leaving instructions for the completion of the collection and its transfer to India.

Aiyar attended the Cocanada (Kakinada) Congress session in December 1923. The session was presided over by Maulana Mahomed Ali. Aiyar desired to move a resolution in the open session defining Complete Independence as India's goal. President Mahomed Ali tried to dissuade him, but Aiyar insisted. Aiyar moved the resolution and spoke on it. But there was none to second him and the resolution fell through. The Congress took six more years to pass a resolution to this effect.

Returning from Cocanada, Aiyar issued an appeal in the Press, in which he said he had the support of such an eminent social worker as a former Judge of the High Court, T. V. Seshagiri Iyer, and explained how the smallest donation was not unwelcome. "Let all our countrymen who have at heart the welfare of the future generation, among whom I hope they will not forget that their children too are, look upon the help that they give to this Tamil Gurukula as an insurance or an annuity fund for the benefit of their children. While some can help the Gurukula with a yearly donation of hundreds of

rupees, there will be very few who cannot spare at least one rupee per month for the Gurukula. Even the poorest, if they can appreciate the necessity of developing this institution can forgo their coffee once a week and save a rupee once a month for the Gurukula. If only our countrymen could wake up and help the Gurukula, I feel sure that even in the course of a year, the Gurukula will grow to be a university which will equal on the one hand the universities of ancient Madurai and Kanchi, Takshasila and Nalanda, and on the other the universities of Manchester and Columbia and Charlottenburg. Every city or group of people who can guarantee a monthly donation of Rs. 15 can have the right of sending one boy for education at the Gurukula..."

As days went by, more and more persons in different walks of life started appreciating the usefulness of the Gurukula. It looked indeed as though Tamil Nadu was to have a major educational institution through these efforts.

December 1924 saw Aiyar going to Belgaum for the annual session of the Congress that was meeting there under the presidentship of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji had survived a 21-day fast for Hindu-Muslim unity, and the question of suspending the Non-cooperation movement and permitting the Swarajist group in the Congress to contest elections was the main topic on the agenda.

Aiyar attended the Congress, and perhaps met the Mahatma once again. This meeting of old friends was followed by another reunion, with Savarkar, who had now been brought to India from the Andamans and interned in Ratnagiri.

The transfer of Savarkar to India came about in this manner : In March 1921, the Hon. K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangar, Member of the Council of State in Delhi,

moved a resolution that the Savarkar brothers be released. Both of them were in the Andamans serving life sentences for sedition. The Government was not easily moved, and Rangaswami Aiyangar thereupon said he was ready to stand security for Savarkar to assure Government of his good intentions and honest motives. The Government then relented and orders were issued for bringing the Savarkar brothers to India. The elder brother, Ganesh Savarkar, was released after a serious illness in 1922. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was interned in Ratnagiri, after a public outcry for his release and the passage of a resolution at the Cocanada Congress urging his release. The terms of Savarkar's internment in Ratnagiri were that he should not participate in politics for five years and should not stir out of the town.

Ratnagiri is a coastal town some hundred and twenty-five miles south of Bombay.

After the Congress session, Aiyar & a young friend of his, T. Sadasivam, went to Goa on a sight-seeing trip. Sadasivam, in his reminiscences of Aiyar published in the "Swarajya" Tamil daily, says : "I am one of those who had the good fortune to move closely with this great man. I saw him first after his return from exile in Pondicherry, when he returned to his native Tiruchi. But it was only after the Belgaum Congress that I had the occasion to know him intimately, when after the Congress the two of us went to Marmagoa. Panjim, Ratnagiri and Bombay. Every second with him was a joyful experience. That great man was always full of deep and soul-satisfying thoughts. All the time his talk would be of patriotism and of the Tamil language.

"I haven't seen another person so deeply attached to the Poet Kamban. I must say Aiyar too was a poet. In

the case of Poet Subramania Bharati, the poetical feeling could not be contained inside his heart; it burst out ebulliently. But with Aiyar, his poetical feeling was well contained inside. It was because of this that he was able to deeply appreciate the nuances of good poetry and enjoy them intensely. Aiyar was one who was immensely moved to ecstasy by the rising sun at the horizon, the luminous moon, the sparkling stars, the vast firmament, the extensive seas, the grand mountains, the dense forests, the rushing flood waters of rivers, and the roaring might of waterfalls. When we were in Panjim beach, on an early evening, two souls treading the sands and taking air, deeply engrossed in conversation, Aiyar suddenly said, "Sadasivam, our people do not look at the skies at all; now look at the stars.' Then he began to identify for me the various constellations by their Indian names, saying, 'That is Aswini, this is Bharani, etc...' After this we went to the famous Christian shrine in the older part of Goa."

Sadasivam then goes on to narrate how they met Savarkar at Ratnagiri.

Says he : "On January 2, 1925, Friday, we went to see that great patriot and hero V. D. Savarkar at his place of internment in Ratnagiri. The two great men were meeting after fifteen long years. They greeted one another by a cordial hug like the rishis of yore. To see the two together was itself a sight for the Gods. We were with Savarkar the whole of the day and took leave of him in the evening. Savarkar escorted us out for some distance. By this time, the Police too had come trailing us. Savarkar smiled and said, 'Is not our Aiyar police-proof?' meaning thereby that it was no wonder that Aiyar had come giving the slip to the police who were alert about visitors to Ratnagiri and Savarkar. When they were finally parting, Savarkar

turned to Aiyar with an entrancing smile and said, 'After how many years are we to meet again?' Aiyar quickly replied, 'No, no. We shall meet often.'

"They then hugged one another once again. What a tragedy, neither of them suspected at the moment that this was to be their last hug of endearing friendship.

"We then went to Bombay, and spent some days with Ganesh Savarkar, the elder brother who was no whit less a shining star of patriotism.

"In Bombay, at Ganesh Savarkar's house, Aiyar and myself parted company. Later, we met for two hours at Madurai on February 27, 1925, and had a long chat. That was our last meeting."

Apart from Sadasivam, Vinayak Savarkar has also recalled this meeting with Aiyar in some detail. Writing in the "Mahratta", after Aiyar's death in June 1925, Savarkar mentioned the London meetings and their despair of meeting each other after last meeting in Brixton jail, and then continues :

"That was in 1910. Fourteen years rolled by, and the impossible actually happened. Travelling the most dangerous and meandering by-paths and by-lanes and subterranean passages of life, so formidably bordering the realms of death, I met Srijut Aiyar a couple of months ago. He had travelled all the distance from Madras to Bombay to enable us to revel a few hours in the wine of romantic joy. We forgot for a while the bitterness and the keen pangs of the afflicted and tortured past and lightly gossiped as boys fresh from school meeting after a long holiday. He took my leave. I watched him disappear and said to my mind, 'Now I can call him again any time I like.'

"Little I knew then that he was to disappear beyond all human recall. When human wisdom shook its head

and snorted out 'Impossible!", events proved it possible and when it gaily assured itself, 'at any time', Destiny put in a stern 'Never!'. Thus our Fate seems to act with no nobler intention than to mock and humiliate human calculations!"

XIX

THE GURUKULAM CONTROVERSY

As THE Tamil Gurukulam of V.V.S. Aiyar was slowly overcoming many initial hurdles, quite unexpectedly a storm broke over its head and the frail craft was grievously damaged. It was a storm in a teacup, a little spark that soon blew up into a big conflagration. But it centred round a vital issue, one that was sensitive, namely, the pretensions of caste superiority. It all started over the exemption given to two Brahmin students from the general cosmopolitan mess, and it generated enough heat to be taken to Mahatma Gandhi for his arbitration. This too failed to bring about an amicable solution and bitterness increased. The matter was taken up in the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, which had donated five thousand rupees to the Gurukulam, and the opinion was strongly divided. When the majority forced its views, leading members like C. Rajagopalachari resigned.

While all these were tragic developments in themselves, it was still more tragic the way the whole thing ended. After months of bitter controversy and agitation, realism prevailed and a way out was at last found by the parties themselves. They were on the point of putting this into effect. At this critical moment, an unkind Fate threw its own bombshell, snatching Aiyar away all so suddenly, leaving things in a mess. Aiyar's reputation was

re-established, but the Gurukulam, in lesser hands, became a wreck and finally closed down. The poisonous side effect of the controversy, namely, suspicions of one another in Brahmin and non-Brahmin minds, continued to poison public life for a long time.

In the social and political milieu of fifty-odd years ago when Aiyar started his Gurukulam, hostel arrangements in all institutions, both public and private, were usually made on a basis of segregation, there being separate dining-halls and kitchens for Brahmins and non-Brahmins among vegetarians. In forward and national institutions, however, an effort was made to introduce a common mess without distinctions of community. Aiyar too arranged only a cosmopolitan mess in his Gurukulam. But soon enough guardians of two Brahmin students desired their wards to be given food separately. Aiyar had not at the outset clearly stipulated a common mess; and the two guardians were enthusiastic patrons of the Gurukulam. Placed on the horns of a dilemma, Aiyar gave exemption to the two boys and they were served food by an ad hoc arrangement, in the passage to the kitchen which was used as a store-room also.

This by itself should have caused no trouble. But, recess came, boys went home and described their school in glowing terms to their people. They also innocently added that two Brahmin boys who were taking food with them at the outset were now being given food separately. Unfortunately, this was taken by some parents interested in social reform as an affront & interpreted as a going back on the original arrangement of a common mess. Aiyar too did not help to clarify the situation when he said the rule in the Gurukulam was that separate mess would be provided for those boys whose parents wanted their wards to be fed separately. To the reformers, this was a dangerous portent.

If exemptions could be given for two Brahmin boys today, what was there to prevent more exemptions being granted day after day? It did not matter to them that only two Brahmin boys were eating separately, and that all the others including a good number of Brahmin boys and Brahmin members of the staff including Aiyar himself, were taking food only in a common mess. Aiyar's example proved his own convictions; but he was an idealist who would not force social reform on others. He hoped his own example and time would bring round even the two exemptionists back to the common mess. The reformists, however, wanted to force the pace.

Almost a year passed. Word-of-mouth discussions finally led to a discussion in the Press. Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, himself a non-Brahmin, took up the matter in right earnest. He was staunchly supported by E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, one of the two Secretaries of the Congress Committee, himself also a non-Brahmin and a vigorous advocate of speedy and drastic social reform.

Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu wrote in his popular "Tamil Nadu" weekly about the Tamil Gurukulam and alleged "discrimination against non-Brahmins" in the dining arrangement in the Gurukulam. This was not correct, as only two Brahmin boys were given exemption and all the others were eating together. Aiyar, in issuing a denial, brought in a larger issue, the settlement of the entire caste question which was very much exercising his mind. Stating that the rule in the Gurukulam was to place the boys in the kind of mess desired by their parents, Aiyar said that he had been for long wanting to find a solution for the vexed caste question in Hindu society; he had been impressed by the casteless society

of the Sikhs, and had been wanting to establish a similar society in Tamil Nadu. Alternatively, he had been wanting to reclassify Tamil society based on work done and not birth; to discuss and achieve this, he had requested the venerable progressive savant Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri to convene a conference for the reclassification of the castes on the basis of work done. The Kavyakanta was away in Kashi and his return to the south was eagerly awaited.

Aiyar had expected that this wholesale solution of the caste question would find enthusiastic acceptance. On the other hand, both Dr. Naidu and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker who were opposed to the very concept of *varnashrama* division which is a basic concept of Hinduism, loudly expressed their opposition to this "new danger". The fact that caste was unknown to pre-Aryan Tamil society was emphasised by both of them, and they preferred a return to that state rather than to the *varnashrama* pattern of later years.

By the end of 1924, Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri had returned to the south and had been elected chairman of the Reception Committee of the annual Provincial Conference of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee which met in Tiruvannamalai. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, who in the decades ahead was to be known as "Periar", unrelenting advocate of social reform, was elected President of the Conference. Both the Kavyakanta and Ramaswami Naicker touched upon the urgent need for social reform. The Kavyakanta expressed his full support to inter-caste dining.

Early in 1925, on January 17, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, which had sanctioned Rs 10,000 to the Gurukulam and paid Rs 5,000, appointed a three-man committee consisting of Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri,

Thiagaraja Chettiar and K.M. Thangaperumal Pillai to settle amicably the inter-dining question in the Gurukulam. The three-man committee failed to find a solution. Thereupon, Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker decided to stop further payment by the Congress Committee to the Gurukulam, and also to block the coming in of other donations, some Rs 20,000 of which was promised and partly collected in Malaya.

A meeting of donors to the Gurukulam was also convened by Dr. Naidu. This meeting was not attended by such leading Brahmin donors like Dr. T.S.S. Rajan. The meeting passed resolutions criticising Aiyar's stand and urging him to end immediately the separate arrangements for the two Brahmin boys, and holding out a threat that unless Aiyar agreed to this, a "satyagraha" would be launched to "capture" the Gurukulam. Following this, a strident campaign of threats and abuses in public meetings was let loose.

Meanwhile word was received that Mahatma Gandhi, that year's President of the Congress, was coming south to Vaikom in Kerala where a satyagraha campaign on Gandhian lines was being conducted to gain for Harijans the right of passage round a famous temple there. Ramaswami Naicker was one of the participants in this satyagraha.

Both Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu and V.V S. Aiyar met the Mahatma in Vaikom, and later again in Madras. The Mahatma had a closed-door discussion which was strictly forbidden to the Press and the public. The Mahatma wrote four lines and gave the original to Dr. Naidu and a copy to Aiyar. What these four lines said was never authoritatively revealed. At Gandhiji's instance, Aiyar modified his stand and undertook not to give any more

exemptions to anyone in the matter of inter-caste dining in the Gurukulam.

At this stage, it boiled down to the question of the exemption granted to the two boys, because, for all the others, the desired cosmopolitan arrangement had been promised and ensured. This ought to have satisfied Dr. Naidu and Ramaswami Naicker, but it did not. Each side claimed that the Mahatma had supported its own stand.

What exactly was Gandhiji's stand on the question of inter-caste dining? In a note published in his "Young India" weekly, in its issue of April 15, 1925, Gandhiji made a general policy-statement on the question of inter-caste dining.

Writing under the title "Inter-dining", Gandhiji said: "A correspondent asks, 'Should children belonging to different castes and living in one boarding-house be made to dine together in a common dining room?' The question is not well put. But the answer to the question as it is put would be that children cannot be made to inter-dine. If, however, it be urged that no boarding-house keepers can make rules requiring all who care to join it to inter-dine, it would be to compel children who are admitted without such stipulation as to inter-dining to dine in company with children belonging to other castes. In the absence of any rule to the contrary, I should imagine that the presumption should be that the usual rules for separate dining arrangements would apply. This question of inter-dining is a vexed one and in my opinion no hard and fast rules can be laid down. Personally, I am not sure that inter-dining is necessary reform. At the same time I recognise the tendency towards breaking down the restriction altogether. I can find reasons for and against the restriction. I would

not force the pace. I do not regard it as a sin for a person not to dine with another nor do I regard it as sinful if one advocates and practises inter-dining. I should, however, resist the attempt to break down the restriction in disregard to the feelings of others. On the contrary, I would respect their scruples."

The Mahatma had spoken. It was clear that he was against forcible imposition of inter-dining, and emphasised regard for the scruples of others. It was clear that his verdict vindicated Aiyar's stand.

But even before the note appeared in "Young India", Dr. Naidu had started accusing Aiyar of not listening to the Mahatma's advice. Both Dr. Naidu and Tiru. Vi. Kalayanasundara Mudaliar, one of his supporters, harped on what they claimed was Gandhiji's advice to Aiyar to respect the wishes of the donors and be ready to return the donations if he wanted to run the institution disregarding their views. The Mahatma was said to have given this advice in the course of the closed-door dicussion with the parties. Whether this was true or not, there was no knowing. And, in any case, as the reformers also had promised to accept Gandhiji's advice, it was strange that they should continue their agitation ignoring the totality of his explicit advice given in "Young India".

Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu's next move was to announce concrete plans for a "satyagraha to take possession of the Gurukula". The campaign for the purpose was initiated in his home-town of Salem at a public meeting in which he said "the unjust way in which the Non-Brahmin boys were separated at the Gurukulam was unbearable." He said he was initiating a fight to the finish and would not mind leaving the Congress if it came to that. He warned Aiyar that "if he did not hand over

the properties of the Gurukula before the end of the month (April 1925), he (Dr. Naidu) would start a satyagraha at Shermadevi and take over possession of the Gurukula."

What was Dr. Naidu's intent now? It was difficult to imagine that he was interested in finding a solution to the question of inter-dining; clearly, he was on the war-path to take possession of the Gurukulam built by Aiyar and run it in his own way. From a Gandhian approach it had now deteriorated into a violent campaign for forcible possession of an institution.

Dr. Naidu's stand was not universally welcomed by all non-Brahmins in the Congress, just as Aiyar's stand was not uniformly supported by all Brahmins in it. M. Bhaktavatsalam, Advocate, for example, in a lengthy statement charged Dr. Naidu with "simply trying to mislead the Non-Brahmins at large by his own misrepresentations"; Dr. Naidu was "reviving communalism at a time when the country is sick of it." Now that Aiyar had agreed to the Mahatma's suggestion that there should only be a common mess (with the exception of the two boys), and a Brahmin cook, there was no point in any agitation at all.

Aiyar, who had been keeping quiet in spite of calumnious statements against him, at last issued a statement in which he said "I declare publicly and once for all it is not a fact that Non-Brahmin boys are not allowed to sit for meals with Brahmin boys at the Gurukula. Only two Brahmin boys are sitting apart in pursuance of the permission given to them by me...No student hereafter taken in the Gurukula will be allowed any exemption from the general mess." The properties of the Gurukulam, Aiyar pointed out, were a trust in his hands; he was forming a Board of Trustees soon. Referring to "the

demands made by Shriman Naidu and others for the return of the moneys subscribed to the funds of the Gurukula by people who have now changed their opinion," he said, were he the owner of the properties and funds of the Gurukulam, he "would not have hesitated a single moment to return their moneys." But as a trustee of the Gurukulam which was a running public institution, he had no right "to dispose of any parts of the funds or properties except for the purpose which would advance its usefulness for the public."

This statement of Aiyar, by sheer coincidence, came out on the same day as Gandhiji's note in "Young India".

But neither the note nor Aiyar's statement lessened the hostility of his detractors. At this stage, Aiyar thought it would be better if he resigned his stewardship of the Gurukula to save the institution On April 21, he sent in his resignation and asked the members of the staff of the Gurukulam to elect a new chief and take over control of all properties. "I want to give up (my responsibilities)," he said, "in order that it may be easier for you to negotiate with your opponents who seem to have developed a special hate against me personally".

"The Hindu", which had been taking a strictly neutral position all along, and reported the Gurukulam agitation impartially, and had been praised by Dr. Naidu for this sense of fairness, editorially welcomed Aiyar's resignation and hoped that both sides would follow a policy of give and take and bring to an end "the suicidal and unsavoury disputation". It also urged that "social questions cannot be solved satisfactorily either by cowardly running away from them or by thrusting changes down the throats of unwilling people."

Aiyar's resignation did not, however, satisfy Dr. Naidu. He saw in this a cunning move to put the Gurukulam in

recalcitrant hands. In a public statement he said, "Mr. V.V.S. Aiyar's resignation does not alter the situation... I am proceeding to Shermadevi during the first week of May. I have wired to the chief donors to proceed to Shermadevi to protect the property. I beg to warn the public and the papers in the North against the malicious misrepresentations of the Brahmin Press. My thanks are due to 'The Hindu' and 'Justice' for giving fairly accurate news. I request friends of all communities and parties who wish to render me active support in the Gurukulam campaign to meet me at the Presanna Venkateswara Row's Choultry, Trichinopoly on the 29th and 30th April. Friends who need travelling expenses will be paid."

So, it was no more a question of just inter-caste dining, compulsorily or otherwise. It had now become a matter of "protecting the property" and "travelling expenses paid" for those who were willing to take it! Ironically enough, while Dr. Naidu condemned "the Brahmin Press" as a whole, he forgot that "The Hindu" that he was praising was the biggest of the Brahmin-owned papers!

The venue of Trichinopoly was chosen because the General Body of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee was also to meet there on the two days, and the Gurukulam issue had also been placed on its agenda.

XX

CONGRESS COMMITTEE DIVIDED

THE TAMIL Nadu Congress Committee met at Tiruchi at 2 p.m. on April 29 in a tense atmosphere. Even as the date for the meeting neared, tension had grown in the two camps, as a result of statements and actions, by lobbying and "horse-trading."

M.K. Acharya, a member of the TNCC. gave notice of a resolution urging that "the Committee shall observe strict neutrality in all non-political matters" and allow full freedom of action in all non-political matters to all institutions that had received aid from the Congress.

Yakub Hassan, a respected senior Congress leader, in a letter to Dr. Naidu said, "As I told you personally, it is my emphatic opinion that the controversy concerning the Gurukula should not be allowed to divide the TNCC. The Committee, I am sure made the contribution of Rs. 5,000 to the Gurukula for the purpose of national education, and as long as the person or persons entrusted with the money are not using it for any other purpose than that for which it was granted, the Committee cannot interfere in the management or enter into questions of details such as cooking, inter-dining or even religious instruction. These matters may have some importance from a Brahmin-Non-Brahmin communal point of view, but the Congress Committee, consisting as it does of not only Brahmins and Non-Brahmins, but also Muslim and

Christian members, cannot take sides in a quarrel which is purely sectional...I, therefore, appeal to you, the President, not to let this matter be discussed on the platform of the Congress Committee, for, if the matter is brought there and a decision not acceptable even to a small minority in the Committee is arrived at, it will have the look of a form of tyranny of the majority, which I am sure you would be the last person to wish the Committee to be accused of."

In sending the copy of his letter to Dr. Naidu to the press for publication, Yakub Hassan added : "I am glad Dr. Naidu will not now move the Congress Committee to express any opinion on the Gurukula controversy or take any action in respect of the Committee's donation to the Gurukula."

This, however, was not to be.

For, the Working Committee of the TNCC did discuss the question and bring an official resolution before the TNCC stating that it "regretted having given a donation of Rs. 5,000 to the Gurukula, as the institution had not declared its adherence to a nationalist policy and had given rise to communal quarrels."

At Shermadevi, the inmates of the Tamil Gurukulam & Bharadwaja Ashrama met on April 28, a day prior to the TNCC meeting at Tiruchi, and elected T.R. Mahadeva Aiyar as the new Chief of the Gurukulam, in place of V.V.S. Aiyar, whose resignation they reluctantly accepted. The Ashramites declared in a statement that they would "defend the properties of the Gurukula by every means within our power against all persons who may attempt to trespass into it."

These developments made the meeting of the TNCC in Tiruchi to assemble with an impending sense of calamity. Forty persons attended. Besides the President, Dr.

Varadarajulu Naidu and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, one of the two Secretaries, prominent members who attended included C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, Barrister T. Aadinarayana Chettiar of Salem, M.K. Acharya, Tiru Vi. Kalyanasundra Mudaliar, S. Ramanathan, N.S. Varadachari, Moulvi Syed Murtuza Saheb and K. Santanam.

Presiding over the meeting, Dr. Naidu said he had been persuaded to bring the Gurukula issue before the Committee at the instance of others. The Committee had given a donation of Rs 5,000 and hence had an interest in its working. If they did not approve of the official resolution, they might pass a censure motion on him.

There was some discussion whether Aiyar had given any undertaking about observing cosmopolitan dining arrangements, and it was made clear that no such undertaking was given in writing, though Dr. Naidu and Ramaswami Naicker maintained that Aiyar orally promised to treat all children alike. Ramaswami Naicker further made a charge that even the cheque for the donation of Rs. 5,000 was issued behind his back by the Joint Secretary, K.S. Subramaniam, after a resolution sanctioning the donation was passed while Naicker and others were away.

After the Working Committee resolution was formally moved, four amendments were moved by members. The first amendment urged substituting the words "regrets having paid" by the words "resolves to recover" in the official resolution. The second amendment retained the words "Committee regrets having paid a grant of Rs 5,000" but blamed the executive for not having obtained a definite statement from the organisers of the Gurukulam on its methods and line of working.

The third amendment, moved by C. Rajagopalachari said : "1. The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee deprecates

public interference in the details of internal management of institutions like the Shermadevi Gurukulam and is of opinion that those in charge of such institutions should be left free to tackle prevailing prejudices and practices interfering with national unity and progress, according to their own judgment with reference to the difficulties and circumstances of each case. 2. In view, however, of the agitation started, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee advises the authorities of the Shermadevi Gurukulam that all pupils in the Gurukulam should dine together without distinction."

The fourth amendment moved by S. Ramanathan said: "This Committee is of the opinions that gradations of merit based on birth should not be observed in Indian social life and recommends this principle to be practised in all organisations partaking in the national movement. This Committee appoints the following gentlemen to help in the practice of this principle at the Shermadevi Gurukulam: Messrs. V. Thiagaraja Chettiar of Devakottai, S. Ramanathan of Mayavaram and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker of Erode."

C. Rajagopalachari, in moving his amendment, said it was difficult to start an institution of the kind now working in Shermadevi, and urged them to leave the internal management entirely to those who were running it. V.V.S. Aiyar, no doubt, would be perfectly willing to overcome trifling difficulties. The question of inter-dining was bound to be solved in the long run, but there was no use hastening the reform while the practice did not obtain in the country. Such separate dining was observed in hostels, in schools and colleges, in temples and choultries, both private and Government-owned. So long as the distinction prevailed throughout the country, there was no use complaining about a single institution.

Rajaji also read out the resolution of the Belgaum Congress on National Education and said the Gurukulam satisfied all the needs. He advised that the chief of the institution should be left free to work out the ideals enunciated. Aiyar had made immense sacrifices and given his life to the Gurukulam. They must show confidence in him and give him an opportunity to conduct the Gurukulam properly.

Seconding the amendement, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan said that he claimed intimate friendship with V.V.S. Aiyar more than anyone else. Inter-dining was not necessary for the progress of any country, and the difficulties now complained of should not be made the basis for communal jealousy. So far as he himself was concerned, he had no distinction. He attempted a few years ago to go to the *cheris* of the untouchables and explain to the people there ideas of sanitation, but the Adi-Dravidas considered his entry as a visitation upon them, broke their pots and tried to run away. They would be no nearer a solution if today Brahmins inter-dined with non-Brahmins. Would the latter eat with Panchamas? he asked.

V.V.S. Aiyar might have committed himself to certain principles with the donors, Dr. Rajan continued, but so far as the Congress Committee was concerned, they could not insist on inter-dining. No undertaking was to his knowledge ever given to the Committee and no promise of any kind was demanded. There was inter-dining for the first three or four months, and then owing to some inconvenience, Aiyar had to give exemptions to two Brahmin students, since he had to respect the scruples of their parents. What was the relation between the Gurukulam and the Congress Committee? The grant of Rs 5,000 alone formed the link. What did they do with regard to the grant of three lakh rupees made to various

individuals in Tamil Nadu for khaddar work? Was any attempt made to recover any amount and did anyone find out if the monies were utilised for the purpose for which the grant was made? Everyone knew Aiyar had spent every pie for the Gurukulam for maintaining the institution.

Speaking in support of the Working Committee's original resolution, Tiru. Vi. Kalayanasundara Mudaliar mentioned the very intimate terms in which he and Aiyar were moving until that day; he and Aiyar conceived the idea of a Tamil Gurukulam not for a day or a month, but forever. Even now he and Aiyar were friends, and Aiyar had written to him privately about a scheme of Tamil studies. If only Aiyar had accepted the award of Mahatma Gandhi, he said, the controversy would never have assumed such serious proportions.

E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, in supporting the fourth amendment moved by S. Ramanathan, said they should not only support Dr. Naidu in this matter with all the emphasis they could command, but go ahead and express their absolute confidence in him. It was not merely the question of inter-dining; the status of superiority of one caste and the inferiority of another must vanish. It would not do if the distinction between Brahmin and non-Brahmin was removed; they must think the panchama also was their equal. If the country was not ripe for accepting this state of things, it was their duty to create public opinion in favour of such a change.

Vayi. Su. Shanmukam Chettiar, a non-member of the Committee, who had helped in the purchase of the Gurukulam site, was permitted by the President to speak on the question before the Committee. He said he was one of those who took great interest in the conduct of the Tamil Gurukulam and gave Rs 3,000, the price of

the site of the Gurukulam. He had thought that with Aiyar's guidance, there would be no discrimination in the treatment of non-Brahmins. He had even gone to Shermadevi to patch up the differences but had not been successful. He asked members to pass the Working Committee's resolution.

Mohamed Usman of Namakkal and Hameed Khan of Madras opposed the main resolution.

Sitting till late in the night, the Committee voted on all points. The official resolution and all amendments except that of S. Ramanathan—the fourth one, appointing a three-man committee—were lost. This amendment was carried by nineteen votes to seven.

Following the meeting of the TNCC, four prominent members of the Committee—C Rajagopalachari, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, K. Santanam and Dr. T.V. Swaminatha Sastri—announced their resignations from the Committee.

In an interview to "The Hindu", C. Rajagopalachari said he had resigned his membership of the Provincial Congress Committee in order to "dissociate himself from the policy and methods pursued by the President, Dr. Naidu." Dr. Naidu's "irritating and provocative methods roused communal bitterness and violence," he said. He was of opinion, continued Rajagopalachari, that there should be no such superstition as pollution of food by sight and that the students of the Gurukulam should dine as one family. But this should be left to the good sense of those responsible for the institution V.V.S. Aiyar had, by no means, forfeited their confidence. Details of internal management of such institutions could not suffer external interference.

Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, in a press statement, said that not much appreciable work had been done in Madras since the Belgaum Congress. While every Congressman

should deplore this inertia, "every sincere well-wisher of the Province cannot but grieve over the storm and dust that has been raised by Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu and his compatriots over the question of a common mess in the Shermadevi Gurukula...The communal ill-feeling and distrust which have been roused by those responsible is beyond question." Dr. Rajan went on to say, "I am not one of those enamoured of eating together for eating's sake, though I have eaten all kinds of food with all kinds of human beings. Nor am I a supporter of Mr. V.V.S. Aiyar in the mess arrangements which he is reported to have adopted in his Gurukulam. I should certainly refuse to send my child to such a Gurukulam. I do not support the confusing statements made by Mr. V.V.S. Aiyar ever since the Gurukula controversy. But I think that this confusion of Mr. Aiyar's attitude is due to his efforts at arriving at a compromise acceptable to all communities. At the same time, the policy of the donors has also not been steady. From demanding a common mess, they have gone in to interfere with the management of the Gurukulam and to demanding their donations back if their wishes are not acceded to. As one of the substantial donors to the Gurukulam, I cannot accept the decision of a group of donors, however powerful they may be, when their decisions have been arrived at deliberately excluding a class of people who have contributed their small share for the funds of the Gurukulam."

In conclusion, Dr. Rajan said: "I do not think Mr. V.V.S. Aiyar's action is entirely justifiable, and I do not agree with the methods adopted by Messrs. Naidu and Naicker to remedy the defect. A big mountain has been made of a mole-hill...Therefore, it is with deep pain that I have decided to dissociate myself from the activities of

a body of workers with whom it was my good fortune t work and suffer together equally during the momentou years of Satyagraha and Non-cooperation. If Brahmin were to do Congress work, they can do it quietly an silently. The spinning wheel knows no caste and wi not quarrel over inter-dining. Mahatma Gandhi ha shown the way and his spinning-wheel will decide th fate of the country...It is with this view that I hav given up the connection I have had with the Tamil Nad Khadi Board and the Tamil Nadu Provincial Congres Committee."

XXI

THE CALL OF THE CASCADE

THE RESIGNATION of C. Rajagopalachari and others from the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee had no effect on Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu or his supporters. Dr. Naidu went ahead with loudly announced plans for "capturing" the Tamil Gurukulam at Shermadevi. But he was to meet a tartar in T. R. Mahadeva Aiyar, who had been elected the new Acharya of the institution in place of V.V.S. Aiyar. Mahadeva Aiyar announced his readiness and willingness to safeguard the Gurukulam from all outsiders. Dr. Naidu's actions were strongly criticised by a non-Brahmin member of the teaching staff of the Gurukulam, Kumbhalingam Pillai, who, in a statement, mentioned that he was the first Non-Brahmin to join the Gurukulam staff and had been there for more than two years, and added : "I once more assure my Non-Brahmin friends that no intention of inferior treatment of Non-Brahmins is ever dreamt of by the authorities of the Gurukulam." He invited the "Non-Brahmin Committee" to visit the Gurukulam and see things for itself, and "cooperate with Sriman Aiyar to make this institution the beacon-light to those interested in National Education."

In Thanjavur, a public meeting presided over by C. Subramania Mudaliar attacked Dr. Naidu "for fomenting communal differences through the Gurukula controversy." The president of the meeting said he and

his friends were ready to start a counter-movement against Dr. Naidu's "so-called satyagraha". They had collected about 220 persons for the counter-movement and would march to the Gurukulam to ensure that its affairs were not disturbed. Similarly, Usman Sahib of Namakkal in Salem District and Hamid Khan of Tiruchi also proposed a counter-campaign against Dr. Naidu's agitation. Venkatachala Reddiar of Tiruchi supported them in this.

In this atmosphere, the Three-Man Committee appointed by the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, consisting of S. Ramanathan, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker and V. Thiagaraja Chettiar, visited the Gurukulam and met Aiyar. They arrived on May 22, 1925, a New Moon day, and found Aiyar busy doing the *tarpana* propitiatory rituals usually done on the *Amavasya* day. Rationalist Ramanathan and non-believer Ramaswami Naicker were visibly restive. Their discussions with Aiyar did not improve the situation; known past positions were reiterated.

Soon after this, Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri, the erudite savant with very forward views, who was held in great respect by both sides, visited the Gurukulam. He found that the points of difference were very few and a working arrangement could be arrived at. Since Dr. Naidu had by this time toned down some of his extreme demands, the Kavyakanta felt the chances of settlement were bright. He appealed to everyone to help by giving up all talk of "satyagraha" and "counter-satyagraha". In response to this appeal, Mohammed Usman and Venkatachala Reddiar "temporarily suspended all platform activities" of their counter-move against Dr. Naidu, but warned both "the present and past Acharyas of the Gurukulam not to sacrifice its principles. An outside Committee managing the Gurukulam is dangerous."

After almost two years of thunder and lightning, of bitter words and painful actions, the atmosphere was at last clearing. Thanks to the Kavyakanta's intercession, sobriety was taking hold of the situation. A final settlement seemed round the corner, and a bright vista of united effort to improve vastly the Gurukulam and its utility seemed to be opening up. It was an unbelievable dawn after a pitch-dark night.

But was it the real dawn ?
While all was hope and brightness—
While all was a happy ending to a tense drama—
Cynical Destiny played an unexpected hand.
Fate threw its own bombshell into the already disarrayed picture.

Like a bolt from the blue came the stunning news of Aiyar's unexpected and heroic death in a waterfall.

No one could believe the news when it came; it was shocking beyond words.

To the outside world, "The Hindu" of Madras reported on June 4, 1925 :

AN ILLUSTRIOUS SON OF TAMIL NADU

SJT. V. V. S. AIYAR

Reported Fatal Accident

(From Our Own Correspondent)

Tinnevelly, June 4

Reliable news is to hand from Shermadevi that Srijut V.V.S. Aiyar has met with a fatal accident at Papanasam Falls.

It appears that while Aiyar was crossing the Kalyanatirtham river with a party of students, his daughter, who jumped on a rock that was slippery, fell into the current, which dragged her away, and that Srijut Aiyar followed

to rescue the girl. Both of them, it is reported, were carried away and precipitated over the Falls. Their traces have not yet been found.

An Ashram boy, who jumped into the river to rescue Sjt. V.V.S. Aiyar. was also carried away by the current, but was miraculously saved.

This first news of Aiyar's death was substantially correct, but was wrong in its details.

But almost everyone was hoping against hope that subsequent news would falsify this first report. Since Aiyar was known to be a very able swimmer and since the Kalyanatirtham river at the place of the accident was not only not deep but also not broad, they hoped he would have escaped being precipitated into the Falls a hundred odd feet further downstream.

Subsequent reports, however, only confirmed the tragedy and added many poignant details.

A keen lover of nature himself, Aiyar was equally keen on inculcating this love among the boys of the Gurukulam. On every conceivable occasion, he would have the boys taken on outdoor excursions. Kolundana Hills, the Papanasam Falls, the Courtallam Falls, Kanya Kumari, Tiruchendur and other lovely spots were thus visited. Usually teachers like Suddhananda Bharati and others took the group out. Oftentimes Aiyar would join them. When Aiyar was in the party, all the strain of walking and carrying the loads would seem light. For, Aiyar would constantly point out the wonders of nature to the boys, making them appreciate the flora and fauna, the scenic wonders and the charms of the environment. With a binocular in hand, he would have the boys see the distant hills and mountains, the cascading waters on their sides gleaming like silver in the sun, the dark rain-bearing clouds during the monsoon season, the hills

hidden by the moving clouds, the everchanging colours of the mountainside, now green, now purple, now golden. Rivulets and rivers were natural spots for both relaxation and refreshment. The boys would cool themselves in a swim in the waters, and Aiyar would, like a youngster himself, join them in the spree. Partaking of refreshments after the swim would add its charm to the excursions.

In 1925, when the annual examinations were over in the last week of May, the natural sequence was an excursion to the hills. This time they planned to revisit the Papanasam Falls some fifteen miles from Shermadevi, Aiyar had taken the boys there on an earlier occasion and had been charmed by it; he even wrote an article on the trip, that was published in the Press. On this present occasion, however, Aiyar did not join them as he was detained by the illness of a teacher in the Gurukulam. The party of the Gurukulam boys and teachers started on the excursion to Papanasam on Monday, June 1, 1925.

But the call of the cascade, the siren voice of Destiny that was to beckon Aiyar and his dear daughter Subhadra to the appointed hour and place, came in the guise of a plea by his daughter. Subhadra, who was very much disappointed because she was left out of the excursion as her father was not going, made persistent requests to Aiyar to start, though late, and join the main party. Moved by the girl's persistence, Aiyar started for Papanasam with his daughter and son on the evening of Tuesday, June 2. They reached Ambasamudram railway station, spent the night there and joined the Gurukulam party at Papanasam at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, June 3.

Papanasam is where a waterfall of the same name is situated. The Papanasam Falls are famous next only to the Courtallam Falls in the same district. Tambraparani,

the only important river in Tirunelveli District, is seventy miles long, and has been from time immemorial the principal feature in the district, says the Manual of the Tinnevelly District by A. J. Stuart, 1879. It is a perennial stream, with more than eight anicuts of substantial masonry, mostly the work of earlier generations. The Tambraparani river flows among mountain ghats, hill forests, shrub jungle and palmyra forests, and has many waterfalls, silvery water cascades, and short tributaries and branches. A bird's-eye view would show the river as a "narrow green winding ribbon with a silver thread in the centre", representing the Tambraparani river and its irrigated green verdure.

Papanasam Falls are located high in the Pothiya Hills, the traditional abode of the legendary Aryan sage Agastya who came south to become the fountainhead of the Tamil language and Tamil culture. The Kalyanatirtham river, high in the hills, is a narrow and shallow ribbon of water, easily forded, but risky because of the rush of the stream. The river is usually crossed here by visitors. A hundred and fifty feet downstream, the river falls into a magnificent cascade, jumping from rock to rock a total depth of about two hundred and fifty feet. At the foot of the falls, there is a huge pool which is used for bathing by pilgrims. Nearby, at the foot of the falls, is a temple of Papavinasa and Lokanayaki, and another of Agastya. One first comes to the foot of the falls, and then ascends the hill to go up above the falls, to enjoy the enchanting scenery.

Aiyar, his daughter Subhadra and son Krishnamoorthy, after arriving in Papanasam, spent some time at the foot of the waterfall. Aiyar left his khadi shoulder-bag with a brahmachari from the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chidbhavananda, who was staying at the Agastya temple. Chidbhavananda was an acquaintance of Aiyar's.

Chidbhavananda came to stay in Papanasam only because of Aiyar. Some time before, Chidbhavananda was leaving for south Madras by train with a view to going to Courtallam in Tirunelveli district, and retire into some secluded spot nearby for contemplative meditation. In the train, he accidentally came across T. R. Mahadeva Aiyar who was travelling in the same compartment and was going to Aiyar's Gurukulam in Shermadevi. Mahadeva Aiyar made enquiries about the young man, but Chidbhavananda, who had no desire to reveal his identity, was reticent. In the course of an almost one-sided conversation, Mahadeva Aiyar spoke of Aiyar and of his Gurukulam. The young man mentally registered the information but it did not mean anything to him just then.

Detraining at Shermadevi and being disinclined to disoblige Mahadeva Aiyar, Chidbhavananda accompanied him to the Gurukulam and Bharadwaja Ashrama where he met V. V. S. Aiyar.

The instant Chidbhavananda saw V.V.S. Aiyar, he realised here was a sage and Aiyar's august personality took him by storm.

Mahadeva Aiyar introduced the young man, and Aiyar made kind enquiries about the young man's journey and its objective. When he learnt of his going to Courtallam for meditation, Aiyar, with parental affection, told him Courtallam was unsuitable, Papanasam would be better. At the foot of the Papanasam Falls, there was an Agastya temple which provided facilities for dwelling; the rustic and undisturbed surroundings at Papanasam would be the best place for quiet meditation.

Chidbhavananda was so impressed by Aiyar's words, that he changed his destination and went to stay in Papanasam.

It was thus that Chidbavananda was staying at the foot of the Papansam Falls when Aiyar and his children came. Aiyar handed over his bag for safe keeping and joined the main Gurukulam party. He never came back to claim his bag.

Aiyar took his bath in the pool at the foot of the falls, swam to a rock in the middle of the seething waters and sat there contemplating the beauty of the scenery around. After bath and breakfast, Aiyar and the Gurukulam party climbed the hills. Although it was an Ekadasi day, a day of fasting, Aiyar kept his pace with the youngsters. The Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Shermadevi. Guru Rao, accompanied the party to a considerable distance and then returned to his camp.

The party reached the Kalyanatirtham river above the falls. Here, Destiny again worked through Subhadra. She expressed a desire to cross the river at this narrow spot. There was not much water in the river, but the current was rapid, and the rocks in the middle, which were to be used as stepping stones, were slippery. Aiyar was at first unwilling to allow the party to cross the river here, particularly as barely a hundred and fifty feet downstream the river was falling into the majestic Papanasam Falls.

But who could resist the call of Destiny ? The importunings of Subhadra prevailed and the party started to cross the river. Standing in mid-water near a rock, where the current was swift, Aiyar helped to relay the youngsters from one side to the other, one after another. Subhadra too wanted to cross the river in the same manner as the boys, jumping from one side to the stone in the centre and then jumping from it to the other shore. Aiyar was reluctant; he was afraid her full-length skirt ("paavaadai") might stand in the way of a free jump.

Touched to the quick, Subhadra asked, "Is it my father who says this, the father who never tires of telling me to be another Rani of Jhansi ?" It was literally the cruel voice of fate.

Silenced by this unanswerable argument, Aiyar helped Subhadra hop-step from one side to another and left her standing on a firm rock on the other bank. Then he turned back to help another lad crossing the river. Hearing a cry of "Appa." ("Father"), Aiyar turned round to see his daughter struggling in the waters. She had slipped and fallen when his back was turned.

In a split second Aiyar jumped into the river to rescue his daughter.

Despite the swift current and slippery rocks, Aiyar reached his daughter, and once he was seen to rise out of the water with his daughter held by the locks of her hair. But this was only for a fleeting moment. The locks slipped out of his hold and Subhadra disappeared into the gurgling waters. The torrential rush near the waterfall's edge threw Aiyar out of gear and he went down the precipice, down the mighty cascade.

It was originally believed that both Aiyar and Subhadra had been thrown down the waterfall. But it was later discovered that Subhadra's body had been stuck up in a crevice in the rocks in the river itself above the falls; only Aiyar had been thrown down the waterfall.

Raghava Poduval, the Ashram boy who fell into the river, had not jumped into it to rescue Aiyar, as reported by the "Hindu". He had been awe-struck by the sudden turn of events and had accidentally slipped into the river. He saved himself by catching hold of a rock in mid-river and hanging on to it for dear life. He was rescued after Herculean efforts by a brave Muslim visitor on the spot, one Ghulam Ghouse.

Shermadevi, Kallidaikuricchi, Ambasamudram and all towns and villages in the vicinity were thunderstruck by the news of the double tragedy. T. R. Mahadeva Aiyar, who was at Kallidaikuricchi, rushed to Papanasam on hearing the stunning news. Guru Rao, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, also reached the spot immediately. The dead bodies not being traced, a vigorous search was instituted all along the Kalyanathirtham river at the top, in the various cascades of the Papanasam Falls and at the Kalyanatirtham pool at the foot of the falls. The flow of water was controlled to facilitate search.

Bhagyalakshmi Ammal, Aiyar's wife, who was in Kulitalai in Tiruchi district with some relatives, on being informed by telegram, travelled in a goods train to Tiruchi and caught a passenger train from there, arriving in Papanasam the day after the tragedy.

Subhadra's body was recovered four days later, stuck up in a crevice in the Kalyanatirtham river above the falls. Aiyar's body was traced the next day in the bottom of the falls.

XXII

"PERSEVERING SERVANT OF THE NATION"

THE NEWS of Aiyar's death cast a gloom over Tiruchi, his native town.

Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, boyhood friend and fellow revolutionary of India House, London days, stood speechless for five minutes, tears rolling down his cheeks when he heard the news.

Dr. Rajan recalled that Aiyar was a brilliant graduate of the Madras University, a First Class B.A. who passed out of St. Joseph's College, Tiruchi. He was one of the few Brahmin students to take Latin for his second language. He was also a scholar in Sanskrit, Tamil and French. At Lincoln's Inn in London, he came out first in Roman Law and in subsequent examinations he had an easy walk-over although he evinced no interest in them on account of his all absorbing interest in the revolutionary movement.

Though born of poor parents, Dr. Rajan said, Aiyar's career was marked by an individuality of character. His private life was absolutely pure and he had regulated his life and conducted it on those fundamental virtues which were almost a living faith with him.

Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, In a telegram to "The Hindu" from Salem, Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu said, Aiyar's death at a time when the settlement of the Gurukulam controversy was in sight was a real calamity.

Aiyar's literary and patriotic merits were unquestionable.

E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, At a public meeting in the Victoria Market, Salem, Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu presiding, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker paid his tribute to Aiyar. He said that he had only the previous week visited the Gurukulam and agreement had been reached on almost all issues.

W.P. Ignatius, an industrialist who was staunchly nationalist, said in a statement, "The Gurukulam agitation has perhaps created an impression that Aiyar was a reactionary in social matters. Far from it. He was driven to take up the position he took because of his desire to first create the necessary mentality before reform was introduced. I have this on his own authority from a talk with him. Others may differ from him and fight an honest battle against him, but he believed in his position Personally, he dined with men of all classes and creeds. There was no condescension in him."

Moulvi Syed Murtuza Sahib, Member of the Legislative Assembly, presiding over a condolence meeting in Tiruchi, said that Aiyar was oppressed by the deplorable state of the country even from his school days. Its amelioration constantly engaged his attention. When he was a pleader, he would not devote much time to professional work, but used to discuss with the speaker and others for hours together measures for the advancement of the country. Even before he left for England, everyone knew him to be a patriot.

Tiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, writing editorially in his "Navashakti" weekly, said, "Tamil Nadu has lost a dedicated son; Kamban has lost a bosom companion; we have lost a friend who was dear as life to us." Aiyar was the embodiment of all virtues and like a *rishi* he

moved among men with a sweet smile on his face.

Mahatma Gandhi, wrote a short note on Aiyar in his "Young India" weekly. He said : "Readers of 'Young India' will share my regret over the death by drowning of Sjt. V.V.S. Aiyar. I had the pleasure of meeting him in London years ago. He was then a fierce anarchist. But he gradually mellowed down. The fire of patriotism burnt nonetheless brightly in him. He was a staunch non-co-operator and latterly he had intended to devote himself to conducting the Shermadevi Gurukul. I always regarded him as a fine, sincere and persevering servant of the nation. May his soul rest in peace !"

V.D. Savarkar, But the most touching tribute came from Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who, in a tearful and poetic tribute published in the "Mahratta",said :

"Heavy griefs have often embittered our life; but none heavier than what thy sudden death caused, oh friend, ever taxed our capacity to endure. Memories of those momentous years and trying days rise in a flood and, struggling to find a vent, keep knocking at the gates of our heart. How we wish we could have spoken of them all and recited our reminiscences. But our lips must remain sealed. How we long to write of the goodness and gentleness of disposition—how when betrayed thou stoodst unshaken, how thou servedst them who owned thee not and how thou sufferedst when unbeknown and modest, and made not the slightest mention of it when thou gotst known—how we long to write of it all. But our pen is a broken reed. The noble story of thy life must for the time being, nay, perhaps for all time to come, remain untold. For while those who can recite it are living, the time to tell it may not come, and when the time comes, when all that is worth telling will no longer remain suppressed and will eagerly be listened to,

the generation that could have recounted it might have passed away. Thy greatness, therefore, must stand undimmed but unwitnessed by man like the lofty Himalayan peaks. Thy services and sacrifices must lie buried in oblivion as do the mighty foundations of a mighty castle.*

"The news of thy sudden death was bitter enough. But bitterer by far is this, our inability to relate to posterity under what heavy obligations thou hast placed them and to express the fullness of our personal and public grief.

"For indeed he was a pillar of strength, a Hindu of Hindus, and in him our Hindu race has lost one of the most exalted representatives and perfect flower of our Hindu civilisation—ripe in experience, and mellowed by sufferings and devoted to the service of men and God, the cause of the Hindu Sanghatan was sure to find in him one of its best and foremost champions in Madras.

"In 1907 or somewhere there, one day the maid-servant at the famous India House in London handed a visiting card to us as we came downstairs to dine and told us a gentleman was waiting in the drawing room. Presently the door was flung open and a gentleman, neatly dressed in European costume and inclined to be fashionable, warmly shook hands with us. He told us he had been a pleader at Rangoon and had come over to England to qualify himself as a full fledged barrister. He was past thirty and seemed a bit agreeably surprised to find us so young. He assured us of his intention to study English music and even assured us that he was eager to get a few lessons in dancing as well. We, as usual, entered our mild protest against thus dissipating the energy of our youth in light-hearted pas-

* It must be remembered that Savarkar was writing this in 1925, in pre-Independent India, at a time when repression of nationalist activities was very severe.—R.A.P.

times when momentous issues hung in the balance. The gentleman, unconvinced, though impressed, took our leave promising to continue to call upon us every now and then. He was Srijut V.V.S. Aiyar.

"In 1910, somewhere in March, we stood as a prisoner, then only very recently pent up in Brixton, the formidable prison in London. The warder announced visits; anxiously we accompany the file of prisoners to the visiting yard. We stand behind the bars wondering who could have come to call on us and thus invite the unpleasant attention of the London Police. For to acknowledge our acquaintance from the visitor's box in front of the prison bars was a sure step to eventually get behind them. Presently one dignified figure enters the box in front of us. It was V.V.S. Aiyar. His beard was closely waving on his breast. He was unkempt. He was no longer the neatly dressed fashionable gentleman. His whole figure was transformed with some great act of dedication of life. 'Oh leader !' he feelingly accosted us, 'Why did you leave Paris at all !' We soothingly said, 'What is the use of discussing it here? Rightly or not I am here, pent up in this prison, and the best way now is to see what is to be done next, how to face the present.'

"While fully discussing the future plans, the bell rang and the warders came rushing and shouting unceremoniously, 'Time up !' With a heavy heart we looked into each other's eyes. We knew it would perhaps be the last time we ever saw each other in this life. Tears rose. Suppressing them, we said, 'No ! We are Hindus. We have read the Gita. We must not weep in the presence of these unsympathetic crowds.' We spoke in Hindi, curious crowds of Englishmen watched the young Indian rebel and his friend. We parted. I watched till he disappeared and said to my mind, 'Alas ! It is well nigh impossible

to see this loving soul again.' For one of two fates was certain to fall to my lot, the gallows or the Andamans, and neither could hold any prospect before me of seeing my friends again.

"This was in 1910. Fourteen years rolled by, and the impossible actually happened. Travelling the most dangerous and meandering by-paths and by-lanes and subterranean passages of life, so formidably bordering the realms of death, I met Srijut Aiyar a couple of months ago. He had travelled all the distance from Madras to Bombay to enable us to revel a few hours in the wine of romantic joy. We forgot for a while the bitterness and the keen pangs of the afflicted and the tortured past and lightly gossiped as boys fresh from school meeting after a long holiday. He took my leave. I watched him disappear and said to my mind 'Now I can call him again any time I like.'

"Little I knew then that he was to disappear beyond all human recall. When human wisdom shook its head and snorted out 'Impossible!', events proved it possible and when it gaily assured itself, 'At any time,' Destiny put in a stern 'Never!' Thus our Fate seems to act with no nobler intention than to mock and humiliate human calculations!

"With Aiyar the politician we cannot concern ourselves here. It is the loss of Aiyar, the scholar, the friend, the noblest type of a Hindu gentleman, the author of Kural (in translation), the saintly soul whose life has been one continuous sacrifice and worship, that we so bitterly bewail today and bitterly chafe at our inability to pay a public tribute to his memory in a fashion worthy of the noble dead. Oh, the times on which our generation has fallen! The noblest sink down and are washed off to the shores

of death, while the unworthy keep gaily swimming on the tides of life.

"But thou hast done thy duty, friend! It was for Human Love that thou livedst, and diedst too for human love as martyr unto her.

"Thou knew no peace in life, Oh Soldier of God. But peace be with thee in Death. Oh friend, peace be with thee and divine rest!"

Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri, whose untiring effort produced the final settlement of the Gurukulam controversy, before putting which into effect Aiyar was snatched away by Death, commented on Aiyar's demise with an old Sanskrit sloka. Said he:

"*Raatrir gamishyati bhavishyati suprabhaatam*
Bhaaswaan udeshyati hasishyati pankajaatam!
Ittham vichintayati padmagate dwirephe
Haa hanta hanta nalineem gajaujjahaara."
('The night will pass soon, and the dawn will come,
The sun will soon rise, and the lotus open'
But while the bee dreamt, caught within the blossom,
An elephant uprooted the lotus plant.
—Translated by John Brough, *Poems from the Sanskrit*, Penguin Classics.)

EPILOGUE

It is more than fifty-three years since Aiyar passed away.

Aiyar's reputation as a scholar has been well established in these fifty odd years. His valuable services to the political life of Tamil Nadu have also been recognised all round.

Aiyar's Tamil Gurukulam at Shermadevi (now spelt Cheran-mahadevi) has had a chequered career after his demise. In other hands, the institution lost its full utility and gradually lost support and closed down. But its landed properties to the extent of 31.5 acres were the bone of contention for many years. In the nineteen-thirties, the properties were handed over to the Tamil Nadu branch of the All-India Harijan Sevak Sangh, at Gandhiji's intercession, and the Sangh conducted a school for Harijans in the Gurukulam precincts for many years.

Sometime in the late nineteen-fifties, the Harijan school closed down or was shifted elsewhere, and the extensive grounds with their old buildings were let out to some caretakers at a throw-away rent. The caretakers had not taken pains to keep the lands in good condition, and nothing was done to perpetuate Aiyar's name. Instead, a proposal was mooted that the properties should be sold away literally to get rid of the responsibility. Shocked admirers of Aiyar were roused to action, and as a result a new Board of Trustees with Swami Chidbhavananda as Chairman, and Aiyar's son Dr. Krishnamoorthy and

four others as members, was formally registered in January 1972. The new Trustees took over the properties and since 1973 have been running the Bharadwaja Ashrama in the precincts, with one resident *sanyasi* in charge. Monthly Geeta Lectures in four or five centres of the district, annual celebration of Founder's Day on April 2nd, and occasional lectures on cultural topics are conducted by the Ashrama.

Aiyar's reputation which had come under a cloud during the Gurukulam controversy of 1924-25, was re-established fully after his death. Both Dr. Naidu and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, his staunchest critics in the controversy, revealed that an amicable solution had been arrived before Aiyar was so unexpectedly snatched away and conceded his fairness without reservation. This is on record, and all efforts in later years to besmirch Aiyar's fair name by blaming him for communal antipathies of later years must be viewed in this background.

Aiyar's contributions to a proper appreciation of Tamil Poet-Emperor Kamban and his Ramayana are now valuable material for use in post-graduate classes of the Madras and Madurai Universities. Aiyar's books "Kural or The Maxims of Tiruvalluvar" and "Kamba Ramayana—A Study" are recognised works of merit quoted by scholars in the international field.

The birth centenary of V.V.S. Aiyar is due to be celebrated in 1981.

His was a life of ceaseless toil for the betterment of the country in political, cultural and industrial fields. As Gandhiji aptly put it, he was indeed "a persevering servant of the nation". In these days of the revival of the spirit of selfless service, we certainly can profit by a study of Aiyar's noble life.

NOTES ON SOURCES

Sources of most events included in the book have been indicated in the text itself. Additional information is given here for those who may be interested.

Chapter 1 : **Varahaneri**

Details of Aiyar's ancestors and of his youthful exploits and early life have been provided by Aiyar's son, Dr. V. V. S. Krishnamoorthy. The Ilam Kali Amman temple, where young Aiyar's courage was put to test, stands to this day near his ancestral house in Varahaneri, Tiruchi.

Chapter 2 : **India House, London**

Shamji Krishna Varma, Savarkar and India House activities—these have been based on information from various sources, mainly Aiyar's London notebook, reminiscences of Aiyar by Dr. T. S. S. Rajan (in his book "Va. Ve. Su. Aiyar", and the biography "Savarkar and His Times" by Dhananjay Keer.

Chapter 3 : **Golden Jubilee of 1857**

The discovery of Kirtikar's treachery and Aiyar's master-minding of M. P. T. Acharya's trick on Scotland Yard are from Dr. Rajan's reminiscences.

Chapter 4: **Madanlal Dhingra**

The attempt to gain battle experience in Morocco is narrated by Dr. Rajan. Apart from Dhananjay Keer's detailed story on Madanlal Dhingra, in his book on Savarkar, a great deal of additional material is available from Aiyar's weekly London Letter published in the "India" Tamil weekly of Pondicherry, edited by poet Bharati. The London Letter gives reactions of contemporary British Press quite exhaustively.

The comments of Lloyd George and Winston Churchill on Dhingra are quoted from W. S. Blunt's book "My Diaries" by Dhananjay Keer in his book on Savarkar.

Chapter 6: **Aiyar Meets Gandhiji**

The amusing incident of how Gandhiji, the chief guest, was ordered about in preparing dinner at the Dussehra celebrations organised by India House is recounted by Dr. T. S. S. Rajan in his book on Aiyar.

Chapter 7 : **Savarkar's Arrest and After**

Copies of letters by Shamji Krishna Varma, Savarkar, Hardayal and Aiyar were provided by Dr. R. V. Ramdas of Bombay. Savarkar's recollection of his first meeting with Aiyar is from his moving article written at the time of Aiyar's death in 1925 and published in "Mahratta" weekly. The full article is given in Chapter 22.

Chapter 8 : **Vikram Singh and Rustum Sait**

Aiyar's hair-breadth escape to Paris and his subsequent dramatic travel through Europe to reach Pondicherry in French India have been narrated by several co-workers including Dr. Rajan, Mandayam Srinivasacharya and Va. Ra. (V. Ramaswami).

Chapter 10 : **Vanchi Shoots Ashe**

The attempt to get Marava chieftains to do away with Ashe, Nilakanta Brahmachari's opposition to this, and Aiyar's fortuitous conversion of Vanchi, Nilakanta's man, to his own point of view were all told to the author by Sadguru Omkar (formerly Nilakanta Brahmachari).

Chapter 9: **A Jar in the Well**

Aiyar's travails in Pondicherry have been described by Mandayam Srinivasacharya in many articles in the Tamil Press, and by Va. Ra. in his book "Mahakavi Bharatiar".

Chapter 14 : **Editor, "Desabhaktan", Madras**

This chapter draws heavily on V. Saminatha Sarma's first-hand pen-picture of Aiyar at the "Desabhaktan" office given in Sarma's book "Naan Kanda Naalvar".

Chapter 15 : **Jailed for an Editorial**

The 1921 trial of Aiyar for sedition is exhaustively reported in "The Hindu" issues of the time.

Chapter 16 : **Tamil Gurukulam**

Details of the objectives, syllabus and day-to-day working of the Tamil Gurukulam are gathered from the Gurukulam Diaries, Aiyar's letters, and from Yogi Suddhananda Bharati's accounts in his biography of Aiyar, "Vira Vilakku Va. Ve. Su. Aiyar".

Chapters 19 and 20 : **The Gurukulam Controversy, and Congress Committee Divided**

These two chapters have been carefully reconstructed from the voluminous accounts published in the contemporary Madras Press of 1924-25. "Tamil Nadu" and "Navashakti" Tamil weeklies which supported Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu against Aiyar, and the neutral "Hindu" whose impartiality in reporting the controversy was commended by Dr. Naidu himself, have been made use of to arrive at a just picture.

Chapter 21 : **The Call of the Cascade**

The last days of Aiyar and the events leading to his unexpected demise in the waterfall are pieced together from personal accounts and contemporary press reports. Swami Chidbhavananda's account of his last meeting with Aiyar, when Aiyar left his khadi shoulderbag with him, was given to the author in an interview some years ago.

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A scholar, a revolutionary and a patriot, V.V.S. Aiyar (1881-1925) toiled all his life for the betterment of the country in political, cultural and industrial fields. Gandhiji called him 'a persevering servant of the nation'. He is the Father of the modern short stories in Tamil. His translation of *Kural* and his *Kamba Ramayanam—A Study* have been appreciated by scholars all over the world.

R.A. Padmanabhan is a journalist in English and Tamil and has received a Gold Medal for his researches on the life and works of Subramania Bharati. He has been a regular contributor to *The Indian Review* and his writings include radio plays and short stories.

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